



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS **ANNUAL REPORT 2007**

Our mission is to promote a caring society through ensuring access to income support and other services, enabling active participation, promoting social inclusion and supporting families.

Department of Social and Family Affairs

An Roinn Gnóthaí Sóisialacha agus Teaghlaigh

www.welfare.ie



CONTENTS

Foreword from the Minister	03
Introduction from the Secretary General	04
Chapter 1: The Department - its business and organisation	05
Chapter 2: 2007 in review	09
Chapter 3: The Department's Goals	15
Chapter 4: Goal 1 - Retired and older people	17
Chapter 5: Goal 2 - People of working age	23
Chapter 6: Goal 3 - Children	31
Chapter 7: Goal 4 - Coverage, access and entitlement	35
Chapter 8: Goal 5 - Poverty, social inclusion and families	45
Chapter 9: Goal 6 - The Department and its staff	53
Appendix 1: Organisation Structure Chart – December 2007	68
Appendix 2: Summary of the Department of Social and Family Affairs Budget Package 2008	70
Appendix 3: Legislation enacted in 2007	75
Appendix 3A: Implementation of the European Union (Scrutiny) Act, 2002	87
Appendix 3B: Regulatory Impact Analysis	88
Appendix 4: Performance against Customer Charter Standards	89
Appendix 5: Annual Output Statement	92
Appendix 6: Progress Report on Capital Programmes	104
Appendix 7: Value for Money and Policy Reviews	106
Appendix 8: Ministers of the Department since 1947	108

Tá leagan Gaeilge den tuarascáil seo ar fáil.

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FOREWORD FROM THE MINISTER

I welcome this final Report, in respect of our Department's **Statement of Strategy 2005-2007**, which outlines the delivery of services in 2007.

Our income and supports services impact on the lives of almost every person in the State. Over 1 million people each week claim a social welfare payment and, when qualified adults and children are included, a total of more than 1.5 million people benefit from weekly payments. In addition, over 580,000 families receive child benefit payments each month. The total expenditure by our Department in 2007 was just over €15.45 billion or €1 in every €3 of day-to-day spending by the State.



I wish to thank all members of staff of the Department for helping to make this happen. I wish to acknowledge the leadership provided by Ministers Seamus Brennan and Martin Cullen during 2007.

This Annual Report once again clearly shows the very positive impact of the Department's services on the lives of many thousands of people in a range of socio-economic situations. This was achieved through direct payments and supporting people to avail of relevant work, training, education or development opportunities.

This Report is, above all, a statement of the progress made in social welfare provision in 2007, outlining improvements in customer service through improved access to front-line services and in information technology which greatly facilitates the delivery of services.

The payment increases delivered through the implementation of the social welfare provisions of the Budget show the commitment that exists to people at all stages of the lifecycle. A key feature of Budget 2007 was that it introduced a number of significant reforms of social policy. Specifically, these:

- tackled remaining child poverty by combining three levels of qualified child increases into a standard higher rate;
- further supported carers through the introduction of an entitlement in certain circumstances to retain a full social welfare payment and to receive, in addition, up to half-rate Carer's Allowance; and
- increased the status and incomes of women pensioners by making progress towards a Government commitment to bring the qualified adult increase up to the level of the State Pension (Non-Contributory) within three years, starting in 2007. Provision was also made to have the qualified adult increase of State Pensions paid directly to the qualified adult.

The other major event in 2007 was the publication of the Government's *Green Paper on Pensions* which outlines the major policy choices and challenges in the pensions area. Our Department will, in 2008, facilitate further consultations in this regard in order to assist the Government in developing a framework for comprehensively addressing the pensions issue for the long term.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Hanafin". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Mary Hanafin, TD
Minister for Social and Family Affairs

INTRODUCTION FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL



This third and final Report on the Statement of Strategy 2005-2007 documents the progress made in 2007 in delivering a wide range of services to customers of the Department, as committed to in the Statement.

The main focus of the Department continues to be the delivery of services to people at all stages of the lifecycle in an efficient and effective manner. This approach is facilitated by improvements in the Department's business, organisation and information and communications technology systems which were further enhanced in 2007 with developments to the Child Benefit, State Pensions, Household Benefits and Free Travel scheme areas. Cash payment options were extended during the year which afford customers a range of payment choices and support customer service.

The introduction of an All Ireland Free Travel Pass, which enables senior citizens of the State to travel free of charge in Northern Ireland, is further evidence of our commitment to a vulnerable sector of our society. The continuing emphasis on helping people of working age to access education and skills which help them to become employed or self-employed is evidence of the diversity of approaches taken by the Department to facilitate people reaching their potential in society. The publication of the Government's *Green Paper on Pensions* during the year commenced a major consultation process to decide how best to secure the incomes of those currently in retirement as well as those facing retirement in the future.

The commitment of staff at all levels in the Department was critical to achieving the many and varied targets set out in the Statement of Strategy 2005-2007. I wish to thank them for their continued dedication and efforts during the year and look forward to their support in meeting the challenges contained in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2008-2010.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernadette Lacey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bernadette Lacey
Secretary General

CHAPTER 1

THE DEPARTMENT - ITS BUSINESS AND ORGANISATION

THE DEPARTMENT - ITS BUSINESS AND ORGANISATION

The Department supports the Minister for Social and Family Affairs in the discharge of governmental, parliamentary and departmental duties. Our main functions are:

- to formulate appropriate social protection and social inclusion policies;
- to administer and manage the delivery of statutory and non-statutory social protection schemes and services; and
- to work with other departments and agencies in the delivery of Government policies.

→ Scale of the Department's business

Our income and support services impact on the lives of almost every person in the State. Over 1 million people each week claim a social welfare payment and, when qualified adults and children are included, a total of more than 1.5 million people benefit from weekly payments. Over 580,000 families receive child benefit payments in respect of 1.1 million children each month. The total expenditure by the Department in 2007 was €15.45 billion.

→ Organisation of the Department

The Department has 4,840 staff (4,400 full-time equivalent posts) and is structured on Aireacht /Executive lines. The organisation structure is set out in **Appendix 1**. Our headquarter offices are located in Carrick-on-Shannon, Dublin, Dundalk, Letterkenny, Longford, Sligo and Waterford. The local delivery of our services is structured on a regional basis. During 2007, the regions were restructured from nine to eight and we currently have regional offices in Cork, Dublin (2), Dundalk, Galway, Limerick, Sligo and Waterford. There is a nationwide network of 60 Social Welfare Local Offices and 65 Social Welfare Branch Offices.

The **Social Welfare Appeals Office** is an office of the Department independently responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements, insurability of employment issues and certain decisions made by the Health Service Executive under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Schemes (web address: - www.socialwelfareappeals.ie).

The **Office for Social Inclusion**, positioned in the Department, works with Government departments, and in consultation with the social partners and other stakeholders, in monitoring the implementation of the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 2007-2016* and the Social Inclusion chapter of the *National Development Plan, 2007-2013* (web address:- www.socialinclusion.ie).

Reach aims to improve the quality of service to personal and business customers of Government and, to this end, has developed the Public Service Broker - an integrated set of processes, systems and procedures - which will enable departments and agencies to deliver improved services by sharing information and common business processes (web address: - www.reachservices.ie).

The **Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)** provides assistance to people on low income who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems (web address :- www.mabs.ie).

MANAGEMENT BOARD



BERNADETTE LACEY
Secretary General



NIAMH O'DONOGHUE
Director General



BRIAN O'RAGHALLAIGH
Assistant Director General



GERRY DALY
Assistant Director General



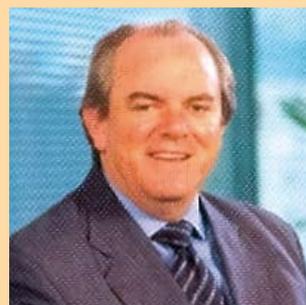
VERA DERVAN
Director



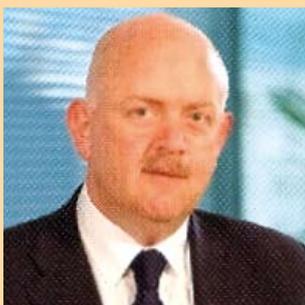
ALICE O'FLYNN
Assistant Secretary



TOM MULHERIN
Assistant Secretary



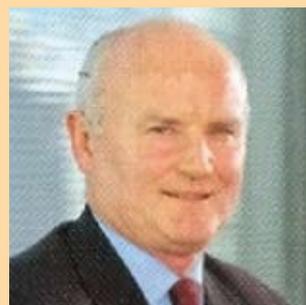
GERRY MANGAN
Director



NIALL BARRY
Director



MAUREEN WALDRON
Director



EOIN O'BROIN
Director

→ Statutory Agencies

A number of agencies, listed below, operate under the aegis of the Department:

- **The Citizens Information Board** provides information, advice and advocacy services in relation to social services (web address:- www.citizensinformationboard.ie);
- **The Combat Poverty Agency** has responsibilities in the areas of advice to the Minister, project support and innovation, research and public education in relation to poverty in Ireland (web address:- www.cpa.ie);
- **The Family Support Agency** is responsible for the Family and Community Services Resource programme, the support, promotion and development of marriage and relationship counselling and other family supports and the provision of a family mediation service. The Agency's responsibilities also include undertaking research, providing and disseminating information about parenting and family issues, and providing advice to the Minister on matters relating to families (web address:- www.fsa.ie);
- **The Pensions Board** is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Pensions Act which concerns the regulation of occupational pensions and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts. The Board also advises the Minister in relation to pensions policy (web address: - www.pensionsboard.ie);
- **The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman** investigates complaints of financial losses due to maladministration, or disputes of fact or law, in relation to occupational pension schemes and Personal Retirement Savings Accounts. The Pensions Ombudsman is a statutory officer and exercises his functions independently (web address:- www.pensionsombudsman.ie).

CHAPTER 2

2007 IN REVIEW

2007 IN REVIEW

Context

The Department's work in 2007 was against a strong economic background. The Irish economy continued to perform well, with Gross National Product growing by 4.2%. This facilitated an increase in social welfare expenditure in 2007 to €15.45 billion. However, the pace of economic growth moderated during the year and this is expected to continue in the coming years. Population and employment continued to grow; the labour force rose to 2.25 million in 2007 (an increase of some 352,000 or around 19% in the five years since 2002). As well as increased participation rates, this increase is attributable to increased numbers of immigrants, in particular people from the new EU member states, which has implications for scheme administration, service delivery and expenditure.

Scale of our business

At present the day-to-day activities of the Department include:

- some 50 separate schemes and services;
- over 2 million new claims/applications a year;
- 6.5 million telephone calls;
- 68 million payments;
- 360,000 assignments conducted by inspectors;
- the promotion and distribution countrywide of 87 different information booklets/leaflets and a wide range of forms;
- publishing the main information booklet (SW4) in 10 languages (Irish, English, Arabic, French, Romanian, Spanish, Chinese, Polish, Russian and Portuguese);
- processing applications for Personal Public Service Numbers (PPSNs) from customers from over 140 countries; and
- headquarter offices in 7 different

geographical locations across the country and a nationwide network of 60 Social Welfare Local Offices and 65 Social Welfare Branch Offices.

In 2007, there was an increase of 6% in the number of new claims received by the Department over the previous year. In the period 2003 to 2007, the number of new claims received has grown by close to 25%.

Annual Output Statement

The Department produced its first Annual Output Statement (AOS) in 2007. The AOS is a high level aggregate report linking the Department's strategic objectives with its annual financial allocations and business plans. The AOS is an important element of the reforms of the budgetary process which were announced by the Minister for Finance in his 2006 Budget Statement. It is designed to enhance parliamentary scrutiny and make departments more accountable for the outputs achieved from public expenditure.

The 2007 AOS for the Department was examined by the Oireachtas Select Committee for Social and Family Affairs on 29 March 2007. The 2008 AOS will report on actual financial outturns and outputs achieved in 2007 as well as setting out targets for 2008.

Policy Developments

→ Launch of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

The new *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion)* was launched by the Taoiseach on 21 February 2007. The Plan was prepared by the Office for Social Inclusion in

co-operation with the relevant Government departments and in consultation with the social partners and other relevant stakeholders. The Plan underlines the Government's commitment to building a fully inclusive society. It is the third and final element of a comprehensive strategic framework for social inclusion which also includes the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, and a separate chapter on social inclusion in the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*.

→ Green Paper on Pensions

The *Green Paper on Pensions* was launched in October 2007, following an intensive review of the pension system by several Government departments and the Pensions Board. Publication of the Green Paper was a *Towards 2016* commitment and the document comprehensively discusses issues relating to social welfare and supplementary pensions in Ireland. It provides new data and analysis on demographic change, the sustainability of the pensions system, and the adequacy of current pension provision. In addition, it contains new analysis of the cost of tax expenditures, the operation of the annuities market, cost drivers for Defined Benefit schemes, the funding standard, charges and retirement age.

The Government also published the *Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund* in October 2007. The Review covers the period from 2006 to 2061, and its purpose is to establish the medium and longer-term financial position of the Social Insurance Fund and provided important information and context that informed the development of the Green Paper.

→ Carer's Allowance

A partial-rate Carer's Allowance payment was introduced on 27 September 2007. This is an arrangement whereby people in receipt of certain social welfare payments, who are providing full-time care and attention, can retain their main welfare payment and receive up to half-rate Carer's Allowance depending on their means.

→ Activation

Two reforms of the social welfare system came into effect from September 2007. The new arrangements enable recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance, Disability Allowance, Pre-Retirement Allowance and Farm Assist to retain more of their social welfare payment if their spouse or partner engages in employment. The new measures are designed to be progressive, particularly for women, as they are currently the majority of 'qualified adults' in the social welfare system. Previously there was no incentive for qualified adults to earn more than €100 per week. Under the new arrangements, a qualified adult will always be better off if their earnings increase.

The second improvement relates to recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance who take up part-time employment themselves, be they single or one of a couple. All part-time workers on Jobseeker's Allowance gained under the new arrangements.

→ Lone Parents

Work on the development of a new social assistance payment for lone parents and other parents on low income continued in 2007. This new scheme will have the long-term aim of assisting people to achieve financial independence through supporting them to enter education, training and employment. To facilitate the development of the policy and operational details of the new scheme and accompanying supports, this Department, with the co-operation of FÁS, the Office of the Minister for Children and the Department of Education and Science, commenced testing the non-income activation proposals in Coolock (Dublin) and Kilkenny in November 2007. The tests are expected to conclude by the end of March 2008.

Service Developments

→ Technical Review of the Social Welfare code

The objective of the Technical Review of the Social Welfare Code is to examine the compatibility of the entire social welfare code with the Equal Status Acts, to identify any instances, or potential instances, of direct or indirect discrimination on any of the nine grounds identified under the Acts. The review commenced in September 2007 with a textual review of the legislation and guidelines followed by an examination of cross-cutting areas. As part of the process, interested organisations and individuals were invited to make submissions through a nationwide advertising campaign. Work is expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

→ Office for Social Inclusion Data Strategy

A key development in the implementation of the data strategy of the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) was the publication of the first two statistical 'social portraits', part of a series commissioned from the Economic and Social Research Institute. These follow the NAPinclusion format by focusing on the various stages of the lifecycle. Thus the first two cover children and older people respectively. OSI is assisted in the development of its data strategy by a Technical Advisory Group which was expanded in 2007 to include technical experts from the social partners.

→ Service Delivery Modernisation

Arising from the ongoing implementation of the Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) programme in 2007, the use of modern technology has facilitated a number of service improvements. The Telephone Allowance, administered under the Household Benefits package, was extended to include a mobile phone allowance in April 2007. Customers now have the choice to either opt for a direct credit to a telephone company for their landline or a cash payment in respect of their mobile phone. Some 11,000 customers

were in receipt of the mobile phone allowance at the end of 2007. Electronic cash payments were introduced in June 2007 for Household Benefits customers who use bottled gas in lieu of electricity or natural gas or who are in rented accommodation and were previously paid by vouchers. The introduction of the electronic cash payment option facilitates customer choice and supports customer flexibility in maximising their benefits from the Household Benefits scheme.

The All Ireland Free Travel scheme was introduced in April 2007 which enables seniors, resident in the State, to travel free of charge on bus and rail services within Northern Ireland. Likewise, seniors in Northern Ireland can travel free of charge on bus, rail, air and ferry services participating in the Free Travel scheme in this State. By year end, some 38,000 customers had applied for and been issued with passes to enable them benefit from the scheme.

→ Payment of Child Benefit by electronic means

As part of the Department's payments strategy, and in line with the Government's e-payment policy, Child Benefit (CB) recipients have been facilitated for a number of years in receiving their payments by electronic means. From April 2008, all CB recipients will be paid by electronic means either via a Post Office or through a bank/building society, the use of paper-based payment instruments will effectively cease. The work involved in preparing for this change is significant and this project commenced in the latter part of 2007. The move to electronic means of payment for all CB customers will result in cost and resource savings in both book production and administration.

→ Secure maintenance of PRSI records

Assessing entitlement to the wide range of insurance based contributory pension and benefit programmes requires that accurate and up-to-date PRSI records be maintained on an ongoing basis. The Department works closely with

the Revenue Commissioners to ensure the quality and timeliness of PRSI data transfers which include end-of-year returns from employers and self-employed contributors. Returns in respect of 2006 were received and processed throughout 2007. These included over 3.35 million employee returns and almost 260,000 self-employment records. Improvements in the quality of the data received, and the use of enhanced computerised matching criteria ensured that the vast bulk of these records could be updated without difficulty or delay. In approximately 70,000 cases further clarification or additional information was required before the records could be finalised. Almost 13,000 customers requested copies of their contribution records in 2007.

→ Automated scanning of Child Benefit claim forms

Automated scanning of claim forms for children aged between 16 and 18 years in full-time education was introduced in September 2007. It allows for the automated processing and payment of claims in respect of children aged over 16 years. Some 65,000 claims were scanned and processed automatically in 2007, representing 70% of all such cases. This resulted in payments issuing to customers more quickly and reduced administrative overheads, including overtime. The use of scanning was further extended at the end of 2007 to enable certain control checks to be carried out automatically.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEPARTMENT'S GOALS

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The Department's Statement of Strategy 2005-2007 *Security with Opportunity* expresses the high level goals, as follows:

→ Goal 1: RETIRED AND OLDER PEOPLE

To ensure adequate, secure and sustainable pensions for retired and older persons and provide additional services in response to changing needs which allow them to maintain a reasonable standard of living on attaining retirement age.

→ Goal 2: PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE

To provide income supports and access to relevant services to people of working age who cannot secure an income (or adequate income) from employment and facilitate them in taking up relevant employment, training, education and development opportunities as appropriate.

→ Goal 3: CHILDREN

To ensure the well-being of all children through income support that assists with child-rearing costs in general, including those which arise in circumstances of particular need or disadvantage.

→ Goal 4: COVERAGE, ACCESS AND ENTITLEMENT

To ensure that the range and level of social security coverage is appropriate to the social and economic circumstances of different groups, that the services for which people are eligible are readily accessible and delivered in an efficient, effective and integrated way, through direct provision to our customers and by supporting agencies in providing services to our customers.

→ Goal 5: POVERTY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND FAMILIES

To support and promote families and to attain better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieving a more inclusive society through co-operating, developing and implementing national anti-poverty strategies, and through the provision of income and other support services for people in debt or at risk of experiencing hardship.

→ Goal 6: THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS STAFF

To develop an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance with a high level of involvement by people at all levels and a climate which fosters personal and career development.

CHAPTER 4

GOAL 1: RETIRED AND OLDER PEOPLE

GOAL 1: RETIRED AND OLDER PEOPLE

To ensure adequate, secure and sustainable pensions for retired and older persons and provide additional services in response to changing needs which allow them to maintain a reasonable standard of living on attaining retirement age.

Context

At the end of 2007, approximately 341,000 people were in receipt of State Pension (Transition) and State Pension (Contributory and Non-Contributory) while almost 64,200 qualified adults and 3,500 qualified children also benefited. In addition, there were just over 1.6 million recipients of the Household Benefits Package (Electricity/Gas Allowance, Free Television Licence and Telephone Allowance) and the Free Travel Pass, the majority of whom were in receipt of pensions for older people.

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Achieve a high level of customer satisfaction by delivering social insurance and assistance pensions and additional services to a high standard.

→ Service Delivery Modernisation

Throughout 2007, the transformational Service Delivery Modernisation Programme continued to be developed across the State Pension (Transition/Contributory) area. Additional resources were temporarily assigned mid-year to clear accrued volume claim loads in a 10 week period and this target was fully achieved.

Work was carried out in preparation for the introduction of the direct payment of the Increase for Qualified Adult portion of the State pension to the spouse/partner in respect of new claims from late September 2007. Significant system development was required prior to implementation to ensure on-target delivery of this new initiative.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure the overall pension system provides a reasonable level of replacement income for retired and older persons and their survivors by:

- (a) Providing adequate and sustainable state pensions.***
- (b) Ensuring extensive, secure and adequate supplementary pension provision, in consultation with the Pensions Board.***

(a) Providing adequate and sustainable state pensions.

→ Budget provisions

Pension increases introduced in Budget 2007 ranged from €16 per week for contributory pensions to €18 per week for non-contributory pensions. These increases brought rates to €209.30 and €200 per week respectively and marked the completion of the Government commitment to bring the minimum rate of pension to €200 per week by 2007. In addition, improvements were made to the income disregards associated with the State Pension (Non-Contributory) scheme whereby the means disregard was increased from €20.00 per week to €30.00 per week from January 2007. The amount of weekly earnings from employment that is disregarded for means purposes was also increased from €100 to €200.

→ Qualified Adult payment increases

In 2007, a special increase of €23.70 per week was granted in respect of qualified adults aged 66 years of age and over being claimed for on State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition) and Invalidity Pension bringing this rate to €173 per week.

The improvement in the rate of the qualified adult increase in 2007 ensures that progress is being made on the Government target to bring this payment up to the level of the State Pension (Non-Contributory). In addition, provision was made in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 to allow for mandatory separate payment of the qualified increase in the case of new pension claims made from 24 September 2007. It is open to the qualified adult to opt for the payment to be made to the pensioner. Voluntary arrangements for separate payments, available since 2002, remain available for existing pensioner couples.

→ Pensioners and Rent & Mortgage Interest Supplement

When assessing means for rent or mortgage interest supplement, from January 2007, a person aged 65 or over who has household income greater than the rate of Supplementary Welfare Allowance appropriate to his or her circumstances, is allowed a disregard of means equal to the difference between the maximum rate of State Pension (Contributory) appropriate to his or her circumstances and the appropriate rate of Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

Budget 2008 provided for further improvements for retired and older people. See **Appendix 2** for full details.

(b) Ensuring extensive, secure and adequate supplementary pension provision, in consultation with the Pensions Board.

→ Green Paper on Pensions

The *Green Paper on Pensions* was launched in October 2007, following an intensive review of the pension system by several Government departments and the Pensions Board. Publication of the Green Paper was a commitment in *Towards 2016* and the document comprehensively discusses issues relating to social welfare and supplementary pensions in Ireland. It provides

new data and analysis on demographic change, the sustainability of the pensions system, and the adequacy of current pension provision. In addition, it contains new analysis of the cost of tax expenditures, the operation of the annuities market, cost drivers for Defined Benefit schemes, the funding standard, charges and retirement age.

Upon publication of the Green Paper, a consultation process began which will continue until mid-2008. A dedicated website was established – www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie – which provides information on the Green Paper as well as a facility through which to send submissions. A series of regional seminars and a major national conference will be held in 2008.

The Government will develop a framework for comprehensively addressing the longer-term pensions agenda by the end of 2008.

→ National Pensions Awareness Campaign

The National Pensions Awareness Campaign was continued by the Pensions Board in 2007, on behalf of the Government. A total of €1 million was allocated for the campaign which included radio, television and cinema advertising, a very successful National Pensions Action Week and publicity drives built around major events such as the Women's Mini Marathon and the National Ploughing Championships.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Implement relevant national and international legislation.

→ Legislation

The Social Welfare Act 2006 and the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 provided for a number of amendments to the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005. The Social Welfare Act 2006 provided for Budget 2007 scheme increases with effect from various dates in 2007. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 provided for other

scheme enhancements including the payment of the qualified adult increase directly to the qualified adult of State pensioners and for a payment of up to half-rate Carer's Allowance, in certain circumstances, to a carer who may be in receipt of another social welfare payment.

The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 provided for a number of amendments to the Pensions Act 1990. The Pensions Act was amended to bring Trust Retirement Annuity Contracts (trust RACs) under the remit of the Act. It was also amended to increase the level of fines applying to both summary and indictable offences and to specify the sections of the Act a contravention of which will warrant the application of an on-the-spot fine. In addition, the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 provided for a number of miscellaneous amendments to the Pensions Act which were mainly technical in nature and relate to provisions concerning the funding standard, disclosure of information, qualifications of trustees, right of appeal to the High Court and authorisation to operate schemes on a cross-border basis. Also, a provision was inserted into the Pensions Act in relation to the accountability of the Chief Executive of the Pensions Board and the Pensions Ombudsman before the Public Accounts Committee.

Primary and secondary legislation enacted in 2007 are outlined in **Appendix 3**.

→ International developments

During 2007, officials from the Department participated in the EU Working Group on the draft pension directive of the European Parliament and Council on improving the portability of supplementary pension rights. A revised proposal was presented to the Working Group in October 2007. This proposal focuses on the minimum requirements for enhancing worker mobility by improving the acquisition and preservation of supplementary pension rights. Discussions on the revised proposal are ongoing.

In 2002, the European Union (Scrutiny) Act was introduced to enhance the role of the Oireachtas in monitoring and debating the activities of

the European Union. **Appendix 3A** outlines the proposals for legislation submitted to the Joint Committee on European Scrutiny by the Department in 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Simplify the regulatory environment in which occupational / personal pensions operate.

→ Simplification

The Department is involved in ongoing consultation with the Pensions Board in relation to both the primary and secondary legislation governing occupational and personal pensions and facilitates amendments to this legislation where required. A Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) was completed on the proposal to bring trust RACs under the remit of the Pensions Act. RIAs are undertaken where appropriate as a tool to simplification.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Review and develop the opportunities for improved service to customers of Household Benefits Package and Free Travel.

→ Household Benefits

The Household Benefits Package provides a contribution towards customers' electricity/ natural gas/bottled gas refill, telephone bills and also covers the cost of a television licence. Following the introduction of new technology during 2007, the Department is in a better position to facilitate market competition and support customer choice by facilitating multiple service providers in liberalised energy and telecommunication markets.

The Telephone Allowance scheme was extended during 2007 to facilitate the inclusion of mobile phones. The option to apply the Telephone Allowance to a landline or mobile phone is now available to all customers. In addition, in August

2007, the value of the Telephone Allowance increased from €24.70 to €25.90 per month.

Electronic cash payments were introduced in June 2007 for new customers who use bottled gas or who are receiving an Electricity Allowance in rented accommodation and were previously paid via a voucher-based system. Existing customers in this category are due to move to an electronic cash payment from the beginning of 2008.

→ Free Travel

Budget 2007 provided for the extension from March 2007, of the eligibility for the companion Free Travel pass to all those aged between 66 and 74, who are certified as being medically unfit to travel unaccompanied.

The All Ireland Free Travel scheme, which commenced on 2 April 2007, allows seniors (aged 66 years or over) resident in the Republic of Ireland to travel free of charge on all bus and rail services in Northern Ireland. Likewise, seniors (aged 65 years or over) in Northern Ireland can travel free on participating services in the Republic of Ireland. The launch of this scheme fulfilled a commitment contained in the Programme for Government to a scheme of All Ireland Free Travel for pensioners resident in all parts of the island of Ireland. Applications for this new scheme are processed in the Department's network of local offices. Work progressed towards the replacement of the existing Free Travel pass so as to improve security and customer service. The Department is liaising with the Rail Procurement Agency to ensure that pensioners and other eligible customers can avail of integrated free travel facilities.

The Department contributed €1.5 million in 2007 towards the Rural Transport Programme operated by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Transport. The Department's funding for this programme in 2007 increased by some 75% over that provided in 2006. This significant increase in expenditure ensures that Free Travel pass holders can travel free of charge on the services provided through the Programme.

CHAPTER 5

GOAL 2: PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE

GOAL 2: PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE

To provide income supports and access to relevant services to people of working age who cannot secure an income (or adequate income) from employment and facilitate them in taking up relevant employment, training, education and development opportunities as appropriate.

Context

The labour force increased by almost 77,500 to 2,250,000 (Quarter 4, 2007) and accounted for 63.9% of all persons aged 15 and over compared with 63.3% in Quarter 4, 2006. The average Live Register for 2007 was almost 162,300. This compares with some 157,400 for 2006. The Live Register at the beginning of January 2007 was some 158,400 and by the end of December 2007 it had increased to 170,400 approximately.

At the end of 2007, approximately 400,000 people of working age were in receipt of payments from the Department. These were paid mainly in respect of unemployment, pre-retirement, employment supports and one-parent families. In addition, the Department has a range of supports available to assist customers of working age back into employment, education and training.

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Achieve a high level of customer satisfaction by delivering social insurance and assistance payments and additional services to a high standard.

→ Claim authorisation

A survey of telephone calls to the Illness Benefit section was conducted to establish the most common customer queries in relation to Illness Benefit. Based on the result of this survey, a notice designed to address these frequently asked questions issued to all general practitioners, to our network of local offices and to all Citizens Information Centres.

Customers who are not paid by their employers while out of work because of illness and have no other source of income receive priority attention

and this continued in 2007. The target that all such cases are authorised within three working days has been achieved.

Illness Benefit customers who may be entitled to Invalidity Pension were contacted and given information on their options and actively encouraged to apply.

→ Customer survey

A survey, involving over 600 customers, was carried out during 2007 in the Disability Allowance section of the Department. The survey showed that 89% of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the manner in which they were dealt with and similar numbers expressed satisfaction with the application process.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Develop specific social welfare schemes for people of working age to ensure that they have an adequate, secure and sustainable income and related supports.

→ Budget provisions

In Budget 2007 a range of improvements were made which provided for increases in the personal rate payable to recipients of the various social welfare schemes for persons of working age. These included:

Personal rates of payment

- An increase of €20.00 per week in the personal rate payable to recipients of the various social welfare schemes for persons of working age. This brought the level of the lowest rate of payment to €185.80 per week, thereby fulfilling the Government commitment to achieve a rate

of €150 per week, in 2002 terms, by 2007. The weekly rates of Increase for Qualified Adults for most working age schemes increased by €13.30 per week.

Maternity and Adoptive Benefits

- The minimum rate of Maternity and Adoptive Benefit increased by €25.20 from €182.60 to €207.80 per week. Budget 2007 also provided for Maternity leave, and thus Maternity Benefit payments, to be extended from 22 to 26 weeks.

Disability Allowance

- Entitlement to the full rate of Disability Allowance was extended to all persons resident in institutions.
- As and from June 2007, the capital disregard for Disability Allowance increased by €30,000, from €20,000 to €50,000. The purpose of this measure is to recognise that families may wish to make financial provision for family members experiencing long-term disabilities.

(See provisions made for **Carers** in Budget 2007 under Objective 5.)

In Budget 2008, various provisions for people of working age were announced. See **Appendix 2** for full details.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Engage meaningfully with persons of working age, particularly marginalised and excluded groups, and provide services directly and in co-operation with other relevant agencies to encourage and support these people in taking up relevant work, training, education or development opportunities.

→ Employment Action Plan

The Employment Action Plan (EAP) is a systematic process whereby persons in receipt of Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance are identified by the Department for referral to FÁS. The purpose is to facilitate access to the range of employment and training services offered

by FÁS. The Plan was introduced in 1998 and implemented on a phased basis using various age and duration thresholds. On 16 October 2006 it was extended to all persons aged between 18 and 64 years who claim Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance. They are identified by the Department for referral to FÁS on reaching three months on the Live Register. Their social welfare payments continue while engaged with FÁS until they take up offers of employment or training, unless they leave the Live Register for other reasons. A total of 51,450 people were referred to FÁS during 2007 and, of these, almost 32,500 had left the Live Register by the end of the year.

→ Education and employment supports for customers

In addition to the Employment Action Plan there is a range of other supports available directly to customers of the Department, either individually or as members of particular groups. The following allowances, grants and projects continued to assist those of working age to access the labour market in 2007:

Back To Education Allowance

The Back to Education Allowance Scheme facilitates people who are long-term unemployed, lone parents and other social welfare recipients in gaining access to second-chance education, either at second or third level, by the payment of a weekly allowance. The objective of the scheme is to raise educational qualifications and skill levels among people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups in order that they will meet the requirements of the modern labour market. As a result of Budget 2007, the qualifying period for the Allowance was reduced from three to two years in respect of Illness Benefit recipients, effective from September 2007. In addition, immediate entitlement to the Back to Education scheme was extended from September 2007 to persons made redundant, provided they have an entitlement to statutory redundancy, i.e. at least two years continuous service, and are entitled to a social welfare payment.

The number of people in receipt of Back to Education Allowance during the 2006/2007 academic year was:

Second Level Option:	3,400 *
Third Level Option:	4,700 *
Total	8,100*

* approximate

In keeping with the Department's policy to extend the range of services available to customers locally, responsibility for decisions on the Third Level Option transferred to local offices during 2007.

Back to Work Allowance Scheme

The Back to Work Allowance scheme is part of the Department's programme of initiatives designed to assist long-term unemployed people, lone parents, people with disabilities and other social welfare recipients to take up opportunities of paid employment or self-employment. There are two strands within this scheme - the Back to Work Allowance for employees and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance for self-employed persons. The scheme allows for retention of a reducing proportion of the social welfare payment plus secondary benefits over three or four years respectively. As part of Budget 2007, entitlement to the scheme was extended to qualified people who are in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance for two years or more at a weekly rate of less than €50.79 (single) or €78.72 (couple) from March 2007. At the end of December 2007, there were over 9,100 participants in the scheme of whom 4,800 were in the self-employment strand and 4,300 in the employment strand. The majority of participants came from a background of unemployment or were lone parents.

Activation

The *National Development Plan 2007-2013* provides for the Social and Economic Participation Programme involving investment of some €50 million over the lifetime of the Plan. The objective of the programme is to meet the key objective of promoting participation and social inclusion through activation measures aimed at all people of working age. Employment has proven to be a major factor for people exiting

poverty and also influences quality of life and social well-being. While social welfare income support remains crucial and must be adequate to meet needs, passive income support alone is not sufficient if poverty and social exclusion are to be comprehensively addressed and people are to have financial independence and reach their potential. Activation, therefore, is being placed on a level with service delivery and control as a central part of the core business of the Department. During 2007, work commenced on the implementation of the activation programme through consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders.

Technical Assistance and Training Fund

This fund provides assistance towards the training and business related expenses of Back to Work Allowance participants and other social welfare recipients. This can include preparation of business plans, marketing strategy, financial projections and business accounts, computer training, small items of equipment or assistance towards the cost of personal liability insurance. The total expenditure from the fund in 2007 was €3.02 million to assist 5,300 customers.

Employment support for people with disabilities

A project, 'Supporting Economic Participation by People with Disabilities', was approved for funding in December 2007 under the new European Social Fund Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013. The project will provide support for people with disabilities to enable them access education and training programmes.

Grants towards the development and promotion of Second Chance Education Opportunities

The overall objective of this grant scheme is to encourage target groups to return to education and training as a means of improving their educational qualifications with a view to returning to the labour force. The flexibility of the scheme allows the Department to fund projects and courses which would not be covered under more restrictive funds/payments such as the Special Projects Fund and Back to Education Allowance scheme. The total expenditure from the grants fund in 2007 was €327,157.

→ PRSI Exemption Scheme

The Employer's PRSI Exemption scheme is a support available to employers to assist them in matching their labour needs with those of unemployed jobseekers. The scheme exempts employers from their share of the PRSI contribution in respect of workers for the first two years of their employment. The highest number of applications received were from the following employment categories: general operative/labourer, clerical/administration, and retail. The total number of PRSI exemptions approved during 2007 was almost 950.

→ Profiling of unemployed customers

The Department, in co-operation with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), has been conducting research into customer profiling since 2001. The research has identified a range of factors which impact on a person's ability to find work and may be used to construct a profiling model which would be robust enough to use on a national basis. A major national study was initiated in September 2006 and is due to be completed by the end of 2008. Its aim is to develop a model which could facilitate the introduction of a National Profiling system. Over a 13 week period from 11 September 2006, additional profile information was gathered nationally, on a voluntary basis, from 45,000 customers who made unemployment claims. Since then, the claim status of each of these customers has been monitored by the project team in the Western Regional Office. The status of those who leave the Live Register, e.g. have gone to work or transferred to another social welfare-type payment, is recorded. Anonymised profile information, together with data relating to the first six months of events on the Live Register, was provided to the ESRI in August 2007. An interim report by the ESRI, based on analysis of the first six months data, is due in early 2008.

→ Family Income Supplement

As a result of increased Family Income Supplement (FIS) income limits provided for in

Budget 2007 there were 37,900 FIS applications in 2007 compared with 33,100 in 2006, an increase of over 14%. New or first-time applications alone in 2007 were almost 14,000 compared with 13,600 in 2006. There were over 22,800 applicants in receipt of FIS at the end of 2007 compared with 21,200 at the end of 2006.

→ Supporting Lone Parents

A Government discussion paper *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents* was published in March 2006. The report put forward proposals for the expanded availability and range of education and training opportunities for lone parents, the extension of the National Employment Action Plan to focus on lone parents, focused provision of childcare, improved information services for lone parents and the introduction of a new social assistance payment for low-income families with young children. Publication was followed by an extensive consultation process undertaken by the Department with representative groups and other interested parties. The Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion is currently developing an implementation plan to progress the non-income recommendations such as childcare support, education, training and activation measures.

A new social assistance payment for lone parents and parents on low income is being developed in the Department. It will have the long-term aim of assisting people to achieve financial independence through supporting them to enter education, training and employment. This process is being overseen by an Implementation Working Group, chaired by the Secretary General. To further inform the process, the Department, with the co-operation of FÁS, the Office of the Minister for Children and the Department of Education and Science, commenced testing the non-income activation proposals in Coolock (Dublin) and Kilkenny in November 2007. These tests are focusing on identifying and resolving any practical and administrative issues that may arise in advance of the scheme being introduced. They will allow for operational and logistical co-ordination between the relevant departments and agencies to be considered and will facilitate the development of the policy and operational details

of the new scheme and accompanying supports. The tests are expected to conclude by the end of March 2008.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Ensure income supports and associated secondary benefits do not create financial barriers to seeking, accepting or improving employment.

→ Work incentives

A number of enhancements were announced during 2007 designed to facilitate and incentivise entry or re-entry into the workforce. In addition, the elimination of unnecessary complexities within and across schemes and the simplification of means testing from an internal and external customer service perspective was an overriding objective. The measures included:

Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist

The introduction of a daily earnings disregard of €20 per day for Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist claimants with children (for up to 3 days per week).

An increase in the daily earnings disregard by €7.30 per day, from €12.70 to €20, for Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist claimants without children. Both of these measures are designed to reward work and standardises the application of the disregard across family types.

Jobseeker's Allowance, Farm Assist, Disability Allowance and Pre-Retirement Allowance

The reform and simplification of the assessment of spouse's earnings for Jobseeker's Allowance/ Farm Assist / Disability Allowance /Pre-Retirement Allowance so as to reward work. The changes involved the abolition of tapered rates increases for Qualified Adults for these schemes and the simplification of the assessment of means where a spouse takes up employment to ensure that existing poverty traps (at certain income levels) are eliminated.

One-Parent Family Payment

The upper income threshold for One-Parent Family Payment was increased by €25 to €400 a week.

Deserted Wife's Benefit

An increase in the earnings-related rates of Deserted Wife's Benefit to the maximum personal rate subject to a qualifying income threshold of €20,000 and also introduced a transitional payment of half-rate Deserted Wife's Benefit for 6 months where a recipient exceeds that income threshold.

Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit

The spouse's income test for entitlement to half-rate Qualified Child Increase with Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit, was increased by €50 from €350 to €400 per week.

→ Rent Supplement

Resulting from the provisions of Budget 2007, a number of improvements to the means test for Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement were introduced in June 2007, aimed at encouraging recipients of Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement to engage in employment without losing all of the Supplement in payment.

Improvements in the qualifying conditions for Rent Supplement were also introduced in 2007 aimed at supporting the transfer to the Rental Accommodation Scheme of Rent Supplement tenants who wish to take up full-time employment.

→ Assessment of capital for Supplementary Welfare Allowance

An improved capital assessment method was introduced in 2007 which eased the assessment of capital for Supplementary Welfare Allowance purposes.

→ Increased capital disregard

As a result of an increase of €30,000, from €20,000 to €50,000, in the capital disregard for Disability Allowance, the number of claimants availing of employment in order to supplement their income rose from 6,500 in June 2006 to 8,800 in December 2007, an increase of over 35%.

→ Phasing out of Pre-Retirement Allowance

Following the extension of the Employment Action Plan to persons aged 55 and over, the Pre-Retirement Allowance was phased out on a 'no new claims' basis with effect from 4 July 2007. Existing customers are not affected by this change. The phasing out of the allowance is consistent with the strategy to encourage and facilitate people to continue working up to and beyond pension age as it removes one of the possible incentives in the social welfare system to retire early from the labour force. This approach is in line with current thinking related to the modernisation of social welfare systems internationally and has been identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as making a potentially positive contribution to this objective.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Ensure that payments and supports to carers are efficient and effective, recognising their needs and adequately addressing poverty and social exclusion and are adaptable to the needs of carers in a changing care environment.

→ Support for carers

Budget 2007 provided for significant structural reforms to introduce new arrangements whereby people in receipt of certain social welfare payments, who are also providing someone with full-time care and attention, can retain their main welfare payment and receive another payment, depending on their means, the maximum of which will be equivalent to half-rate Carer's Allowance. Similarly, people currently in receipt of

a Carer's Allowance, who may have an underlying eligibility for another social welfare payment, can transfer to that other payment and continue to receive up to a half-rate Carer's Allowance, as provided for in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007. In September 2007, a nationwide advertising campaign on television, radio and newspapers was undertaken for this initiative in addition to issuing a mailshot to over 56,000 potential customers. A significant response was received and by the end of 2007 almost 6,000 claims were awarded. The arrangements apply to almost all weekly social welfare payments including State Pension (Contributory and Non-Contributory), Widow/er's (Contributory and Non-Contributory) Pension and to people in receipt of qualified adult increases.

→ Training for carers

The Department, in the context of its Disability Sectoral Plan, is committed to working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and FÁS to progress issues associated with training for carers and this is reiterated in *Towards 2016*. During 2007, it was decided that this issue would be advanced in the context of the development of the National Carers' Strategy.

Carers were identified as a priority theme under the 'Economic and Social Disadvantage' category in the Dormant Accounts allocation for 2007. The intention of this allocation for carers is to fund appropriate training programmes. During 2007, discussions were held with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and Pobal to advance this initiative.

→ Budget 2007: Carer's scheme enhancements

Budget 2007 introduced a range of Carer's scheme enhancements as follows:

Carer's Benefit

Although Carer's Benefit is a social insurance based payment, there is an earnings limit above which a person cannot qualify for the payment. In April 2007, the earnings limit increased by €30

to €320 per week as a result of improvements announced in Budget 2007.

Carer's Allowance

From January 2007, the rate of Carer's Allowance was increased by €18 per week to €218 for recipients aged 66 and over. The rate of Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit was increased by €20 per week, to €200, for recipients aged under 66.

Carer's Allowance income disregard

From April 2007, the income disregard for Carer's Allowance was increased by €30 per week for a single person and €60 per week for a couple, to €320 and €640 respectively.

Respite Care Grant

Respite Care Grant is a payment made annually to all carers who are providing full-time care to an older person or a person with a disability, regardless of the carer's means or whether they are in receipt of a social welfare payment. In Budget 2007, the level of the Respite Care Grant was increased from €1,200 to €1,500 with effect from June 2007. Approximately 40,600 carers, including those in receipt of Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit, received a Respite Care Grant in 2007. Of this number, approximately 10,900 carers were not in receipt of a weekly social welfare carer's payment.

to the Government for consideration and influenced the developments announced, both in the health and social welfare areas, in Budgets 2006, 2007 and 2008 and also the national partnership agreement *Towards 2016*.

→ National Carers' Strategy

Towards 2016 commits the Government to the development of a National Carers' Strategy that focuses on supporting informal and family carers in the community which is to include appropriate consultation with the social partners. During 2007, there were extensive negotiations between relevant departments with regard to how best to advance this commitment. Government approval was received for the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Working Group to develop the Strategy. This Group will be chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach with the secretariat being provided by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The Departments of Finance, Health and Children, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Health Service Executive and FÁS will be represented on the Working Group. It was also agreed that the Strategy will cover the period 2008 to 2016.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

Ensure that a strategy regarding the financing of long-term care is developed.

→ Long-term Care Working Group

A Working Group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and comprising senior officials of the Department and of the Departments of Finance and Health and Children, was established in January 2005. The objective of this Group was to identify the basic policy options for a financially sustainable system of long-term care, taking account of the various reports and consultations that have taken place in this area. The report of the Working Group was submitted

CHAPTER 6

GOAL 3: CHILDREN

GOAL 3: CHILDREN

To ensure the well-being of all children through income support that assists with child-rearing costs in general, including those which arise in circumstances of particular need or disadvantage.

Context

The principal child income support administered by the Department is Child Benefit, paid monthly in respect of each qualified child. By December 2007, there were 580,000 recipients of Child Benefit in respect of 1.1 million children. In addition to Child Benefit, more selective measures are used to channel child income support to low-income families, including targeted payments such as Qualified Child Increases (QCIs) paid to weekly social welfare recipients, and Family Income Supplement (FIS) paid to people in low-income employment with children. At December 2007, QCIs were in payment in respect of approximately 340,000 children, at either full or half-rate while FIS was in payment to some 22,800 recipients, benefiting more than 47,500 children.

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Achieve a high level of customer satisfaction by delivering income support for families and children to a high standard.

→ Customer service

Automated scanning of claim forms for children aged between 16 and 18 years in full-time education was introduced in September 2007. It allows for the automated processing and payment of claims in respect of children aged over 16 years. Some 65,000 claims were scanned and processed automatically in 2007, representing 70% of all such cases. This resulted in payments issuing to customers more quickly and reduced administrative overheads, including overtime. The use of scanning was further extended at the end of 2007 to enable certain control checks to be carried out automatically.

As part of the Department's e-Payment strategy, all Child Benefit customers will be paid electronically by June 2008, either at post offices or at a bank or building society.

Preparatory work was completed for the introduction of a faster, fully automated continuing eligibility process for the payment of the Qualified Child Increase on pension claims for children aged between 18 and 22 years in full-time education and will be implemented in 2008.

→ Customer survey

A survey, involving over 1,100 Child Benefit recipients was carried out during 2007. The survey findings indicate improvements in all areas when compared with the 2006 survey. In 2007, 90% of respondents stated they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the service received, compared with 87% in 2006. 91% found the application forms easy to complete, compared to 89% in 2006.

→ Q-Mark

The Q-Mark, the national symbol of quality in Ireland, initially awarded to Child Benefit section in Letterkenny in 2005 for excellence in customer service, was retained in 2007 with an increased mark.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure the range of income support schemes for families and children provides adequate help in circumstances of particular need or disadvantage.

→ Budget provisions

The improvements which were provided for in Budget 2007 came into effect from various dates in

2007. In particular, all Family Income Supplement weekly income thresholds were increased by amounts ranging from €15 per week for a one-child family to €185 per week for an eight-child family. This continued the policy, commenced in 2006, of re-focusing additional resources at larger families. As a result, while payments in respect of all children increased, the amounts payable per child in larger families was brought more into line with the level of support provided for smaller families.

In addition, the three Qualified Child Increase (QCI) rates were standardised at €22 per week. By increasing QCIs for the first time in 12 years, this change represents a selective approach to child income support through targeting children in poorer households, while at the same time limiting the extent to which employment incentives are worsened. Budget 2007 also provided for the following improvements in the level of child income supports:

Child Benefit

Lower and higher rates of Child Benefit were increased by €10 per month to €160 and €195 respectively from April 2007.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance

Budget 2007 provided for increases in the rate of payment for Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance of €60 per child for children aged 2 to 11 years and €95 per child for children aged 12 to 22 years bringing the 2007 rates to €180 per child for children aged 2 to 11 years and €285 per child for children aged between 12 and 22 years.

School Meals

Additional funding was made available in 2007 for the School Meals scheme to include additional schools and projects. Total expenditure on the scheme in 2007 was in excess of €27 million. Priority for funding is given to disadvantaged schools in the Department of Education and Science initiative 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS).

Supplementary Welfare Allowance/Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement

From June 2007, Guardian's Payment is disregarded from assessment for Supplementary

Welfare Allowance and for Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement.

Widowed Parent Grant

The Widowed Parent Grant was increased by €1,300 to €4,000 with effect from Budget Day 2006.

In Budget 2008, various child-related provisions were announced. See **Appendix 2** for full details.

→ Early Childcare Supplement

The Early Childcare Supplement payment issued in respect of approximately 400,000 children each quarter in 2007.

→ Changes to Child Benefit Regulations

In 2007, Regulations were introduced to provide that, where a child has been placed in foster care or with a relative by the Health Service Executive for six months, payment of Child Benefit will transfer to the foster parent. Regulations were also introduced to provide for the extension of Child Benefit to children over the age of 16 years who are receiving home schooling. Provision was also made for these changes to be reflected in the eligibility criteria for the payment of the Early Childcare Supplement.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Improve the level of information available about the circumstances of children in families in order to better inform policymaking in the area of child poverty.

→ National Longitudinal Study of Children

Growing Up in Ireland, the National Longitudinal Study of Children is the most significant of its kind to be undertaken in the Republic of Ireland, particularly in terms of the cost, scope and length of study period. The aim of this Study

is 'to examine the factors, which contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families'. It will monitor the development of 18,000 children – an infant cohort of 10,000 and a nine-year-old cohort of 8,000, yielding important information about each significant transition throughout their young lives. The Study is overseen by a Project Team comprising officials from this Department, the Office of the Minister for Children and the Central Statistics Office. Fieldwork for the nine-year-old cohort commenced in May 2007, with access to the Child Benefit register facilitated by the Department and this will be completed in early 2008. Fieldwork for the infant cohort is expected to commence in September 2008 following extensive pilot testing.

CHAPTER 7

GOAL 4: COVERAGE, ACCESS AND ENTITLEMENT

GOAL 4: COVERAGE, ACCESS AND ENTITLEMENT

To ensure that the range and level of social security coverage is appropriate to the social and economic circumstances of different groups, that the services for which people are eligible are readily accessible and delivered in an efficient, effective and integrated way, through direct provision to our customers and by supporting agencies in providing services to our customers.

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure that the coverage of the Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) system is appropriate to the respective circumstances of employed, self-employed and other categories.

→ The Social Insurance Fund

The Social Insurance Fund moved from a deficit of €127 million in 1996 to a surplus of €670 million in December 2006. The estimated surplus in respect of 2007 is €680 million - with the current estimate for the accumulated surplus to the end of 2007 being €3.75 billion. An *Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund 2005* was published and presented to the Houses of the Oireachtas in October 2007. The focus of the Review, which covers the period from 2006 to 2061, was to establish the medium and longer-term financial position of the Fund. The report examined matters from a number of different aspects in the context of surpluses or deficits, whether benefit payments are up-rated to prices or earnings and as a percentage of Gross National Product. It also projected the number of years that existing reserves can be used to keep contribution rates below break-even rates. In addition, it examined the impact of a number of potential enhancements to social insurance coverage into the future and the extent to which the Fund is redistributive through examining value for money in notional cases.

→ Budget provisions

The following PRSI provisions were introduced in Budget 2007 and were effective from January 2007:

- the threshold for payment of 2% Health Contribution increased from €440 to €480 per week and the annual threshold increased from €22,880 to €24,960;

- the threshold for employee PRSI increased from €300 to €339 per week;
- the annual threshold for PRSI increased by €2,200 from €46,600 to €48,800; and
- an additional 0.5% Health Contribution on earnings over €100,100 per annum was introduced.

In addition, people on Farm Assist are now eligible to pay PRSI as self-employed contributors if they meet the standard contribution criteria.

→ Bilateral agreements

The revised agreement with the UK, providing for workers moving between Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, came into effect on 1 October 2007. The bilateral agreement with the Republic of Korea was signed by the Minister on 31 October 2007 and preparations are ongoing in order to bring the agreement into effect at an early date. Discussions have commenced with Japan and plans are being made for the opening of negotiations on a proposed agreement shortly. All agreements provide for the determination of which social insurance system applies to workers moving between the two countries and the aggregation of records for contributory pensions where the person's record under one country's system is insufficient. The UK agreement also provides for cover in respect of the following short-term benefits:

- Illness Benefit;
- Maternity Benefit;
- Jobseeker's Benefit; and
- Occupational Injuries Benefit.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure effective administration of PRSI-related entitlements.

→ Secure maintenance of PRSI records

Assessing entitlement to the wide range of insurance-based contributory pension and benefit programmes requires that accurate and up-to-date PRSI records be maintained on an ongoing basis. The Department works closely with the Revenue Commissioners to ensure the quality and timeliness of PRSI data transfers which include end-of-year returns from employers and self-employed contributors. Returns in respect of 2006 were received and processed throughout 2007. These included over 3.35 million employee returns and almost 260,000 self-employment records. Improvements in the quality of the data received, and the use of enhanced computerised matching criteria ensured that the vast bulk of these records could be updated without difficulty or delay. In approximately 70,000 cases, further clarification or additional information was required before the records could be finalised. Almost 13,000 customers requested copies of their contribution records in 2007.

Improvement in co-ordination of social security for EU workers

The rules on the co-ordination of social security systems are currently contained in Regulation 1408/71 and its implementing Regulation (EEC) 574/72. In 1998, the Commission presented a proposal to modernise and simplify the provisions of Regulation 1408/71. However, these new rules on co-ordination can not be applied until the corresponding implementing regulation, to replace Regulation 574/72, has been adopted and this process is currently underway. Throughout 2007, the Department continued to engage actively in the negotiations on the new implementing regulation.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Ensure that the rules for entitlement to social assistance payments are appropriate to the circumstances of claimants, are easy to understand and are applied in a fair and consistent manner.

→ Means Review

The members of the Means Review Working Group continued its deliberations during 2007. The Group was actively involved in the development of two reforms of the social welfare system which came into effect from September 2007. The new arrangements enable recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance, Disability Allowance, Pre-Retirement Allowance and Farm Assist to retain more of their social welfare payment if their spouse or partner engages in employment. The new measures are designed to be progressive, particularly for women, as they are currently the majority of 'qualified adults' in the social welfare system. A 'qualified adult' is the partner of the person receiving the relevant social welfare payment. The overall aim of these reforms is to encourage spouses and partners to move into employment and beyond long-term part-time employment. The previous system offered no incentive for qualified adults to earn more than €100 per week. Under the new arrangements, a qualified adult will always be better off if their earnings increase.

The second improvement relates to recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance and Farm Assist who take up part-time employment themselves, be they single or one of a couple. All part-time workers on Jobseeker's Allowance gained under the new arrangements.

The changes introduced a system whereby both adults associated with a Jobseeker's Allowance claim are assessed in a similar manner with common disregards and assessments applying to both.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Ensure that, for entitlements that are wholly or partly medically based, the arrangements for medical examination and assessment are of a high standard and are applied in a consistent and effective way.

→ Medical Review and Assessment Service

The function of the Medical Review and Assessment Service (MRAS) is to confirm the eligibility for illness, disability and carer schemes. This is based on medical certification and reports provided by the customer's medical practitioner or on medical examination undertaken by Departmental Medical Assessors.

A review of the MRAS was conducted with a view to modernising the service. One of the key recommendations of the review, which reported in 2006, was that the cadre of Medical Assessors should be increased and deployed on a regional basis and that the number of assessment centres would be rationalised. In 2007, the cadre of Medical Assessors was increased from 21 to 25 and the number of assessment centres was reduced from 64 to 57. The issue of deployment to regional locations was substantially progressed with the assignment of six Medical Assessors to regional locations in Letterkenny, Longford, Galway and Cork. Other recommendations arising from the review will be progressed in 2008. In 2007, over 36,000 medical examinations and 73,000 desk-check reviews were carried out.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Deliver (and support the delivery of) a quality, comprehensive and up-to-date information service to internal and external customers, other state agencies and the wider voluntary and community sector.

→ Information Services

The primary purpose of the Department's Information Service is to ensure that all customers and stakeholders receive comprehensive and

accurate information on rights and entitlements in a clear and easily accessible manner that meets their needs. To ensure this, the following initiatives were supported in 2007:

Information grants

A total of €1.15 million was allocated in 2007 to various national organisations and voluntary groups for information dissemination projects and to address the information needs of older people, carers, people with disabilities, emigrants and immigrants.

Advertising

A pro-active approach was taken to advertising the Department's schemes and services in 2007. This was done through a mix of national and provincial media, information leaflets, fact-sheets, direct mailshots, advertising in over 60 Credit Unions nationwide and a LoCall number to provide information on new schemes and services. The newly introduced All Ireland Free Travel scheme and the half-rate Carer's Allowance were advertised on television and regional newspapers. The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance was advertised on national and local radio and in national newspapers. In addition, a Budget Awareness Campaign was conducted to highlight changes to social welfare services announced in Budget 2008. This consisted of a newspaper campaign directing members of the public to a LoCall telephone number. Budget fact-sheets outlining changes were distributed widely in print and electronic format.

Plain English

The Department continued to work with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) during 2007 to ensure the use of 'plain English' in all information leaflets, booklets and application forms. In this regard, a 'style guide' was agreed with NALA to allow for consistent layout and phrasing of the Department's material.

Publications

Information booklets and application forms were updated to reflect budget and other changes. An updated version of the Guide to Social Welfare Services (SW4) has been available on the Department's website since December 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

Promote and develop a strong customer service culture through the Department and the agencies under its aegis and deliver continuous improvement in customer service.

→ Customer Charter

The Department of the Taoiseach commissioned an evaluation of all customer charters during 2007. Arising from this evaluation, it was recommended that charters be updated at the same time as Customer Action Plans and cover a 3-year period. Work commenced in 2007 on the Customer Action Plan and Charter for 2008-2010.

Performance against the Department's Customer Charter standards in 2007 is set out in **Appendix 4**.

→ Language services

In recognition of the diverse needs of customers the Regional Director's Office, in conjunction with Information Services, has rolled out an Interpretation Service, which is a three-way phone system, and is now operational in 30 offices across the regions. Plans are in progress to extend this service to all offices in 2008.

Application forms and information booklets were translated into Irish and made available on the Department's website.

→ Excellence Through People Awards

Staff of three local offices in the South East Region - Kilkenny, Carlow and Wexford and the Regional Management Team in Waterford - achieved the Excellence Through People Award the FÁS National Human Resource Management Standard. This was the first time a local office received this award. The areas examined included Communication and People Involvement, Leadership and People Management, and Business Planning and Quality Improvement.

→ OBJECTIVE 7

Provide a satisfactory service in Irish, in line with the requirements under the Official Languages Act.

→ Official Languages Act 2003

The scheme for the provision of services in Irish, as required under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act, was confirmed in early 2007 and came into effect in June. Specialised training courses were delivered to front-line and Gaeltacht-area serving staff.

→ OBJECTIVE 8

Develop the Standard Authentication Framework Environment (SAFE) programme externally and internally and support the development of an identity policy framework for the governance and delivery of identity management services.

→ SAFE project

Proposals for a revised registration service were agreed and the business requirements for the SAFE were identified in 2007. A roadmap outlining the evolution of the Public Services Card was revised and a Request for Tender for the procurement and development of the card issued in December 2007. The necessary legislation to support the ongoing development of the Department's identity policy was included in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 9

Develop and implement efficient and effective customer identity management systems, provide identity management services to external agencies and ensure that security and privacy principles are developed and implemented.

→ Redesign of Central Records System

Initial modelling and prototyping has taken place on redesigning the Department's customer

database. The project will develop this system to support continued modernisation of the Department's service to customers and the delivery of services across multiple channels. A Request for Tender for this project issued in 2007 and a contract is expected to be awarded early in 2008 following which the development phase of the project will begin.

Phase 2 of Public Service Identity (PSI) was deployed in October 2007 with a number of additional search and update facilities for use by internal authorised departmental personnel. This phase also enhanced the existing security and logging features. Since July 2006, PSI has been successfully supporting the Public Service Broker's first major service - Revenue's PAYE On-line. In the period July 2006 to December 2007, PSI has facilitated the verification of personal identity for over 290,000 users of PAYE On-line.

→ OBJECTIVE 10

To deliver through the Reach project a standard means of access to public services through the Public Services Broker (PSB).

→ Reach Services

Reach, through its Public Service Broker - Reachservices - facilitates or directly provides the following services:

Authentication of on-line identities

There are approximately 2.2 million PAYE taxpayers in the country and it is estimated that 1 million of these have internet access. To date, some 200,000 customers have registered and have had their on-line identities authenticated with Reachservices.ie. Registration facilitates secure access to Revenue's PAYE on-line system whereby customers can update or query their tax records.

Secure Messaging Service

Reachservices provides secure messaging services, as follows:

Revenue and the Department of Agriculture and Food

This aspect of Reachservices facilitates the processing of EU refunds (worth some

€29 million in 2007) due to exporting food processors. The number of transactions/ declarations on this service has grown from 585 in 2005 to 8,300 in 2007. Automation of this process has meant quicker refunding to the businesses concerned along with the administrative benefits associated with a single point of customer access to Government.

Births and Child Benefit

Reachservices was used to deliver notifications and related messages in respect of some 60,000 births during 2007. This positively impacted on the parents who, in 2007, secured initial or increased payment of Child Benefit without having to produce birth certification or fill out an application form.

Notification of deaths

Reachservices delivered notifications and related messages including validated PPS Numbers in respect of some 26,600 deaths during 2007. Some 5 agencies (including 26 local authorities) subscribe to the notifications service. Automatic notification of death events enables agencies to update their own pensions and payments and other databases and thereby ensure more timely and cost-effective closure of accounts.

Electoral Register Management

Local Authorities use the Death Notification service to assist them in managing their electoral registers.

→ OBJECTIVE 11

Ensure that customers have access to services through a choice of service delivery channels and continue development of the service delivery modernisation plan for delivery of social welfare services.

→ Electronic payments to customers

The Department has extended the range of payment options in recent years. Customers have a wide choice of electronic payment methods including Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT), by which payment is made directly to the customer's account in a financial institution and Electronic

Information Transfer (EIT) which is made to a post office designated by the customer. Substantial progress has been made in 2007 to increase the use of electronic methods of payment for customers, as follows:

- all Social Welfare schemes now have an EFT option;
- improvements to the design of claim forms to facilitate people wishing to opt for electronic payment options continued;
- the introduction of the EFT payment method to dentists and opticians for the payment of Treatment Benefits from November; and
- from September, the majority of new claims received in the Department are given the option of receiving their payment by EFT to an account in a financial institution, or by using a social services card at a post office.

By the end of 2007, over 43% of weekly/monthly payments to customers were being made by EFT, and 9% were being paid by EIT, with the remainder paid by either cheque or personal payable order book.

→ Electronic payments to contractors

From November 2007, all contractors under the Department's Treatment Benefit schemes - some 1,430 dentists, 458 opticians and 90 audiologists - receive their payments by Electronic Fund Transmission (EFT). These contractors were previously paid by cheque.

→ OBJECTIVE 12

Modernise and improve the delivery of services to the Department's customers through the development and implementation of agile ICT systems and organisational change programmes.

→ Service Delivery Modernisation Programme

The Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) programme is a multi-annual programme of work involving the introduction of new technology and

the replacement of outmoded computer systems. It also involves the redesign of office systems, business processes, procedures and work practices and the introduction of new organisational structures. The programme is being implemented within the Department on an incremental basis and was extended to Child Benefit, Household Benefits and Free Travel schemes during 2007. Some 570,000 Child Benefit claims, 340,000 Household Benefit and 400,000 Free Travel customer records were successfully transferred to the SDM system during 2007 and day-to-day work on the claim administration of these schemes is now being routinely processed on the new system.

The SDM Business Object Model was further expanded during 2007 to cater for new business initiatives as follows:

- certification functionality was developed for the Child Benefit scheme to provide a control measure allowing ongoing certification of entitlement;
- the scanning of returned Child Benefit certificates was successfully implemented in September realising significant increases in productivity in dealing with the extension of Child Benefit schemes to children over 16 years of age;
- the scan functionality was further developed to allow for scanning of Household Benefits applications and to cater for continuing eligibility certification; and
- individualisation functionality was implemented in September whereby schemes were transferred to State Pension (Contributory) from Invalidity and State Pension (Transition), as the customer reached 66 years of age.

→ OBJECTIVE 13

Ensure access at a local level to a wider range of services and more effective collaboration with other agencies in the delivery of those services.

→ One-Parent Family Payment

In keeping with the Department's policy to extend the range of services available to customers locally, the programme to devolve One-Parent

Family Payment claim processing to local offices continued in 2007. At the end of the year, 42 local offices and their associated branch offices were processing new claims locally. Of these offices, four had also taken on the stock previously maintained centrally in Social Welfare Services, Sligo. There are now 33,500 One-Parent Family Payment claims in payment in local offices.

→ OBJECTIVE 14

Ensure that error, fraud and abuse are prevented, detected and deterred by implementing effective risk-based controls of all income support and related expenditure.

→ Control policy

The following aspects of the Department's control policy were implemented during 2007:

Control strategy

The Department's control policy aims to keep fraud and abuse to a minimum by promoting control as an essential element of the day-to-day work of the various work areas. A four-pronged approach is taken to the control of schemes, namely, prevention of fraud and error at the initial claim stage, early detection through effective review of claims in payment, measures to deter fraud, and the pursuit and recovery of overpayments. The introduction of systematic risk analysis of major schemes is now a key element of the approach to tackling fraud and abuse in the social welfare system and by the end of 2007, 13 of the Department's major expenditure schemes had been subject to the risk analysis process. Fraud and error surveys of schemes are undertaken to establish baseline levels of fraud and abuse. In 2007, surveys commenced on State Pension (Non-Contributory) and One-Parent Family Payment. These initiatives have facilitated a more focused and targeted approach to control activity.

Public awareness

The Department endeavours to raise public and staff awareness in combating fraud in a number of ways including publicising the outcomes of court cases in respect of persons transgressing the social

welfare code. The Department's policy is to seek recovery of monies received fraudulently or without entitlement and to prosecute those who defrauded the social welfare system and employers who failed to comply with their statutory obligations with regard to social welfare legislation. In 2007, 243 cases were finalised in court. Press releases are issued detailing the outcomes of the Department's control activity and the outcomes of court prosecutions, where possible, were publicised in the local and national press.

Co-operation with other agencies

An important element in the process of implementing an effective control policy is co-operating with other Government departments, state agencies, local authorities, employer groups and trade unions, to ensure that information and best practice is shared, subject to the statutory obligations under data protection legislation. During 2007, the Department continued to improve links with a number of relevant bodies, both national and international, and participated in a number of committees which dealt with issues of relevance to control.

Nationwide Employer Inspection project

The Department's Special Investigation Unit commenced a nationwide employer inspection project from 1 May 2007. The project focused on the construction sector. The purpose of the exercise was to:

- ensure the employer was PRSI/PAYE compliant in respect of all employees;
- investigate the employment status of workers categorised as self-employed;
- assess and collect the PRSI liability, where appropriate;
- check all workers for possible concurrent working and claiming/signing and confirm identity where necessary; and
- advise employers on the code of practice pertaining to the insurability of employment.

The savings achieved on this project was just over €2.6 million.

Personal Public Service Number allocation centres

The Personal Public Service (PPS) number is the main personal identifier for accessing a broad range of services. The Department has undertaken to establish one centre in each county with the exception of Cork and Tipperary which will have two centres. This will build up expertise amongst staff and combat attempted abuses of the PPS Number allocation process. At the end of 2007, a total of 20 centres were established across the regions.

Identity fraud

Emphasis continues to be placed on combating identity fraud with a specific focus to ensure that persons do not use false identities to obtain Personal Public Service numbers or to facilitate the fraudulent receipt of social welfare benefits. A combination of training programmes for local staff and internal back-up services contributed to the continued detection of false applications. In 2007, a total of 93 persons were arrested by An Garda Síochána in connection with offences under the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Act, 2001 for possession of false/forged documents following detection by staff.

Outcomes

Gross savings from the control activities on scheme payments amounted to almost €448 million in 2007 (see table below). Some 346,000 claims were reviewed in this process. In addition, inspections of employer records identified arrears of PAYE/PRSI amounting to €6.05 million.

Savings	€m
Unemployment	138.64
Illness	70.10
OPFP	151.63*
Pensions	36.50
Child Benefit	18.07
Carers	4.73
PAYE/PRSI	6.05
Others	21.87
TOTAL	447.59

* Savings do not include maintenance recovery figures, which are unavailable.

During 2007, a total of 361 cases were forwarded to the Chief State Solicitor's Office for the initiation of court proceedings. This figure includes four civil cases. Civil cases are taken to facilitate (i) the recovery of scheme overpayments (ii) the collection of PRSI arrears and (iii) the enforcement of maintenance recovery orders against the liable relatives of One-Parent Family Payment recipients.

243 criminal cases were finalised in 2007 with the following results:

Outcome	Number
Fined	117
Imprisoned	12
Suspended Sentence	22
Community Service	7
Probation Act	53
Bound to the Peace	4
Adjourned/Struck out/dismissed	23
Withdrawn	2
Debt Paid/ Decree obtained	3
TOTAL	243

→ Debt recovery

Considerable efforts continue to be put into improving the effectiveness of debt recovery measures and pursuit of defaulters. The new Overpayments and Debt Management (ODM) system continued to roll-out throughout the Department during 2007 and it will be operational in all areas of the Department by mid-2008. Arising from the implementation of the debt management strategy a new Debt Management Unit has been established. The Unit will have a focused debt management role and will pursue debtors with large overpayments who are no longer dependent on welfare payments. It will commence its work once the new ODM system is fully operational.

→ OBJECTIVE 15

Ensure maintenance of timely, accurate and efficient systems of decision, appeal and redress for social welfare entitlements.

→ Decisions, appeals and redress

The Decisions Advisory Office (DAO) within the Department continued to play a pro-active role in the provision of advice, support and training to Deciding Officers in the Department, to ensure that decisions in regard to applications, or reviews on continued entitlement to social welfare payments, were carried out in a consistent and high quality manner. Over 400 requests were made to the DAO in 2007, by Deciding Officers and others, seeking advice on the interpretation of legislation and guidelines in relation to decisions on claims. With the aim of achieving consistency in decision-making and providing clarification on issues, the DAO continued to liaise with the Social Welfare Appeals Office during 2007. Regular meetings were held with that Office to discuss issues arising on the application of the legislation in decision-making.

→ Freedom of Information

In 2007, the Freedom of Information (FOI) Unit within the Department continued the administration of FOI along with the provision of ongoing support and advice to staff. A total of 370 FOI requests were received, of which 11 were withdrawn. Of the requests received, 342 (92%) were from members of the public seeking access to personal records, including 17 requests from staff members. There were two mixed requests and the remainder were for non-personal records. A redesigned FOI Information booklet - SW89 - which contains the Department's FOI forms, was produced and is available to the public through local offices of the Department and on the Department's website.

→ OBJECTIVE 16

Ensure that the social welfare code meets the requirements of the Equal Status Act 2000, as amended, and other relevant legislation.

→ Review of the Social Welfare code

The Department is carrying out a technical review of the social welfare code, statutory and non-statutory, to examine its compatibility with the Equal Status Act, 2000 (as amended). The purpose of the review is to identify any instances of difference in treatment on any of the nine grounds identified in the Act that are not justified by a legitimate social policy objective. The review is being carried out in two phases. Phase 1, a scoping exercise, was carried out in 2006. It established the most appropriate approach and methodology to carry out the main review. Following a tendering process, the Department contracted independent consultants to carry out Phase 2 which commenced in September 2007. The project is being carried out in modular format and involves the examination of all schemes administered by the Department. As part of the process, interested organisations and individuals were invited to make submissions through a nationwide advertising campaign. A Project Board comprising representatives from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Office of the Attorney General are overseeing the project which is expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

CHAPTER 8

GOAL 5: POVERTY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND FAMILIES

GOAL 5: POVERTY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND FAMILIES

To support and promote families and to attain better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieving a more inclusive society through co-operating, developing and implementing national anti-poverty strategies, and through the provision of income and other support services for people in debt or at risk of experiencing hardship.

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Monitor, evaluate and report on the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP) which incorporates the objectives and targets of the revised NAPS and the partnership agreement 'Sustaining Progress'.

→ Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006-2007

In November 2007, the Minister launched the first annual Social Inclusion Report covering the period 2006-2007, delivering on a commitment contained in the national social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*. This first report, which was prepared in the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) in co-operation with Government departments, details progress on:

- the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*;
- the social inclusion elements of *Towards 2016*; and
- the social inclusion elements of the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*.

This new streamlined reporting approach aims to achieve a more comprehensive and efficient monitoring process. The report shows that progress was made and that social inclusion targets were on track for 2006/2007.

→ Social Inclusion Forum

The fourth meeting of the annual Social Inclusion Forum was held on 15 November 2007 in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham. The Forum was attended by approximately 250 participants from the voluntary and community sector, the statutory sector, local representatives and members of the National Economic and Social Forum. The Forum provides people who are affected by poverty and

social exclusion and their representatives with an opportunity to input their views on social inclusion issues, identify barriers and constraints to progress and how best these can be tackled and provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

A key element of the 2007 Forum was four parallel workshops, which were designed to maximise input from participants. The workshops were focused around five of the High Level Goals identified in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, relating to children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities and the integration of migrants. A full report of the Forum will be formally submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration, which is chaired by the Taoiseach, early in 2008. The Office for Social Inclusion and the National Economic and Social Forum co-funded and co-organised this event. The Forum was also the subject of an EU Peer Review whereby representatives from eight EU Member States and the EU Commission attended to observe and learn from the Irish experience of stakeholder involvement.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure that there is a clear knowledge and understanding of the nature, extent and causes of poverty and social exclusion and the strategies to address it.

→ Poverty impact assessment

An important element of the remit of the OSI is to promote the incorporation of anti-poverty and social inclusion objectives in public policy development by implementing new guidelines for poverty impact assessment. During 2007,

the Office provided assistance to Government departments on the application of the new guidelines. The experience being gained from this process will assist in the development of a training course for staff across all Government departments. In addition, the Combat Poverty Agency worked with a number of local authorities during 2007 on applying the new guidelines in a local government context.

→ Poverty measurement /Data Strategy

In line with a commitment in *Towards 2016*, the Technical Advisory Group, which advises the OSI on issues related to a data strategy on social inclusion, was reconstituted and expanded in 2007 to include representatives of the social partners.

During the year, Government departments continued the process of finalising their individual data strategies which will identify their data requirements for each stage of the lifecycle. In line with this approach, the Office of the Minister for Children commenced work on the development of an overarching data strategy on childrens' lives.

→ Social portraits

The launch of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion was accompanied by the first two in a series of 'social portraits' commissioned by the OSI from the Economic and Social Research Institute. These portraits focus on the various stages of the lifecycle; the first two dealt with children and older people. The portraits are designed to be read by a wide audience, including members of the public, policy makers and others involved in the policy process. They present information in a colourful visual format to provide an easily-absorbed picture of the socio-economic circumstances of the different lifecycle groups. The portraits provide the basis for further developing strategies to address the problems experienced by particularly vulnerable groups at each stage of the lifecycle.

→ Research

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion states that the Government will work to ensure that research which it commissions and supports is effectively aligned with the priorities in the Plan. The OSI and the Department commenced a review of the programme of research into poverty and social exclusion during 2007. An evaluation of the research programme of the Combat Poverty Agency was also initiated during 2007.

→ Communications

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion recognises that there is a need for effective communication on the trends and challenges in relation to poverty and social exclusion and on the ongoing process for tackling this problem. A key element of the work of the OSI during 2007 related to the development and implementation of a social inclusion communications strategy, commencing with the launch of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. This was complemented by the introduction of a recognisable social inclusion brand and logo, and information and stationery packs to help increase awareness and communicate social inclusion developments to members of the public and especially to those experiencing poverty and exclusion. In the course of the year the OSI produced a number of social inclusion themed articles for inclusion in relevant publications. A range of social inclusion posters was produced and disseminated to all Social Welfare local offices, Citizen Information Centres, Family Resource Centres and libraries.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Develop the next National Action Plan.

→ National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion was prepared by the Office for Social Inclusion in consultation with relevant Government

departments and was launched by the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on 21 February 2007. The Plan underlines the Government's commitment to building a fully inclusive society.

The Plan is the third and final element of a comprehensive strategic framework for social inclusion which also includes the ten-year framework social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016* and the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*. This framework reflects the need for an effective whole-of-Government response to the challenges of poverty and social exclusion. The Plan sets out a wide-ranging and comprehensive programme of action targeted at helping those vulnerable groups on the margins of Irish society to share the greatly improved living standards and opportunities that the majority enjoy.

The Plan uses the lifecycle approach which places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery and offers a framework for implementing a streamlined, cross-cutting and visible approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion. The lifecycle stages are: children; people of working age; older people and people with disabilities. In addition, targets and actions which cut across various stages of the lifecycle are included in the chapter on communities.

The Plan identifies 12 high level strategic goals in certain key priority areas in order to mobilise resources to address long-standing and serious social deficits to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. These high level goals are accompanied by over 150 more detailed targets and actions across all stages of the lifecycle: children (42 targets); people of working age (28 targets); older people (18 targets); people with disabilities (8 targets); and communities (57 targets).

→ Co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland on Social Inclusion issues

The Irish and UK Governments are committed to developing and promoting further North/South consultation, co-operation and common

action concerning policies on poverty and social exclusion. Common text which appears in Northern Ireland's social inclusion strategy - *Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland* and in Ireland's *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* outlines how the UK and Irish Governments are committed to developing and promoting co-operation in this area. It commits Ireland and Northern Ireland to preparing a Joint Report to include:

- an overview of areas of existing North/South co-operation;
- areas potentially suitable for further co-operation; and
- advice on the mechanisms by which this work might be undertaken and delivered.

The Joint Report was submitted to the British-Irish Inter-governmental Conference in February 2007 and approval was given by the Conference to continuing North/South joint work to alleviate 'social exclusion, poverty and deprivation to help create a more inclusive society on the island of Ireland'.

→ British-Irish Council

The British-Irish Council was created under the Agreement reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations in Belfast in 1998 to promote positive, practical relationships among its members, which are the British and Irish Governments, the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

The Council works as a forum within which member administrations consult and exchange information with a view to co-operating on issues of mutual interest. One of the priority areas of work for the Council is social inclusion and in 2006 and 2007 has focused on the issue of child poverty and lone parenting. The Council is actively considering a number of policy areas as part of this topic, including access to employment, training and education, affordable childcare, social welfare benefits and supports and policies to reduce teenage pregnancy.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Develop a strategic process to facilitate the development of integrated policies to meet the needs of families in a changing society.

→ Strategic approach to supporting families

A report was commissioned in 2006 which looked at the key demographic, economic, social and other relevant changes taking place which are impacting on families and family life. On foot of this, it was agreed that a publication will be prepared that will aim to describe families in modern Ireland, to detail the range of supports available and to outline major policy developments over the past decade. It will also include a summary of supports specifically directed at families and will outline the likely future trends in relation to family change and the challenges these pose for current policies and programmes. Considerable work was undertaken in 2007 with other relevant departments and agencies in compiling the information necessary for the publication which is due to be launched in mid-2008.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Ensure that the Family Support Agency (FSA) receives the necessary support and resources to enable it carry out its functions and implement its strategy in relation to supports for families.

→ Family Support Agency

The Family Support Agency was allocated a budget of over €35 million in 2007, an increase of some 25% on the budget in 2006. This level of funding allowed the Agency to deliver on its Strategic Plan commitments in 2007 which included the provision of support services and related information for families, the continued development of the Family Resource Centre Programme and further expansion of the national Family Mediation Service. An additional €1.8 million in funding was allocated to the Agency in

Budget 2008. Specific achievements during 2007 included:

- the further expansion of the national Family Mediation Service to 17 centres;
- an increase in funding for the family counselling grants scheme to over €10 million leading to the direct support of more than 540 voluntary and community groups nationwide; and
- total funding for the Family Resource Centre (FRC) programme of over €18.31 million with 106 FRCs supported.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

Complete the development of policies to provide a more effective and integrated range of income and other supports for families at risk of poverty, particularly lone parents and large families, designed to enable them achieve greater self-sufficiency and social inclusion.

→ Income support for Lone Parents

From January 2007, as a result of changes to the Family Income Supplement scheme introduced in Budget 2007, all Family Income Supplement earnings thresholds were increased by amounts varying from €15 to €185 per week, depending on family size.

→ Family Service Project Fund

The Family Service Project Fund is used to provide or co-fund training and development programmes for disadvantaged social welfare customers and their families including very young lone mothers, other parents rearing children without the support of a partner, carers, travellers, and people with disabilities. The Fund aims to increase the capacity of those in the most difficult circumstances to improve their self-esteem and personal and family situations through the training, developmental and educational opportunities made available. Initiatives covered under the Fund include parenting skills courses, family support and personal development programmes. The Fund, of which almost €3 million was spent in 2007, is administered by facilitators based in the Department's local offices.

→ OBJECTIVE 7

Ensure that no person experiences hardship for want of basic necessities, because they have exceptional needs or because they have difficulties accessing relevant services.

→ Supplementary Welfare Allowance

Supplementary Welfare Allowance is administered by the Health Service Executive through Community Welfare Officers at local health centres on behalf of the Department. It consists of a means-tested basic weekly allowance payable to those whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. Additional supports including Rent/Mortgage Interest Supplements, Diet Supplements, Heating Supplements, Exceptional Needs Payments and Urgent Needs Payments are also payable.

→ Core Functions Transfer Programme

The Government, in its decision of 28 February 2006, accepted the recommendations of the *Core Functions of the Health Service Report*. The Report recommended the transfer of certain functions from the Health Service Executive to other agencies, principally this Department and to consider transferring certain other functions from this Department to the Health Sector. The scope of the decision includes:

- transferring income support and maintenance schemes (including Supplementary Welfare Allowance) together with associated resources to the Department;
- transferring the General Register Office to the Department; and
- examining the mechanics of transferring the Dental and other Treatment Benefits from the Department to the Health Sector.

A Steering Group chaired by the Department and including representatives from the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive and the Department of Finance, is overseeing the implementation of the Government decision. Reporting to them are four separate cross-departmental implementation groups each dealing with the various different elements of the transfer programme. A further Government decision in September 2007 endorsed the implementation proposals drawn up by the Steering Group.

→ Transfer of Supplementary Welfare Allowance and Community Welfare Service to the Department

Planning for the management of the organisational, human resource and service delivery issues arising from the transfer of the Community Welfare Service were advanced in 2007 and include:

Communications

The transfer programme involves significant organisational, human resource and service delivery issues for all of the stakeholders involved in the process. To this end, a communication and consultation strategy has been devised which will allow for ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders associated with the programme.

Industrial relations

Intensive discussions with the unions representing the Community Welfare Service staff in relation to the implications of the transfer for those involved are ongoing. The unions representing staff in the Department are also being kept up-to-date on the matter.

Enabling legislation

Section 24 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 provides for the transfer of functions between the Health Service Executive and the Department. The provision allows for the continuation of the existing role of Community Welfare Officers once they transfer to the Department. All other aspects of the legislation as applies to the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme remain unchanged.

→ OBJECTIVE 8

Support, through a nationwide Money Advice and Budgeting Service, families and individuals identified as having problems with debt and moneylending.

→ Money Advice and Budgeting Service

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) provides assistance to people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems. There are 52 independent companies nationwide delivering advice and a company - MABS National Development Limited - was established to support and develop the Service. A management committee drawn from local, voluntary and statutory services and community groups runs each local project. Local MABS operate as partnerships of all relevant agencies. There are 246 staff throughout the network.

Many voluntary and statutory bodies such as the Irish League of Credit Unions, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Community Welfare Service, Citizens' Information Centres, Centres for the Unemployed and local authorities work closely with the programme. During 2007, co-operation with these and other organisations such as the Free Legal Advice Centres, the Residential Redress Board, The Irish Bankers Federation and the Financial Regulator continued to identify and address the issues that give rise to problems of over-indebtedness for people on low incomes.

In 2007, a total of some 12,400 new clients approached MABS. The majority of these clients were aged between 26 and 40 years and were single or single with children. The majority of clients, some 57%, were in receipt of a social welfare payment and a further 29% were in work. 61% of clients had no second income. The active caseload at the end of the year comprised almost 19,200. Most people had approached MABS of their own volition. The total amount owed by the new clients to creditors, based on what their debt was when they first approached the service amounted to €94.6 million in 2007.

During 2007, a Code of Practice, Customer Charter and a Customer Complaints procedure were agreed for MABS and implemented across the network. In addition, the MABS National Telephone Helpline was launched in October 2007. The service is available from 9.00 am to 8.00 pm Monday to Friday and offers a confidential, non-judgmental service in support of the existing MABS service.

CHAPTER 9

GOAL 6: THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS STAFF

- HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY
- GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES
- SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKING ENVIRONMENT
- POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

GOAL 6: THE DEPARTMENT AND ITS STAFF

To develop an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance with a high level of involvement by people at all levels and a climate which fosters personal and career development.

Context

Providing a quality service in an expanding business continues to be a high priority of the Department. The involvement of staff and their support at all levels is an important aspect of the Department's internal services. The main developments in those areas in 2007 are presented under the following headings:

- Human Resource Management and Organisational Development
- Information and Communications Technology
- Governance and Management of Resources
- Safe and Healthy Working Environment
- Policy Development and Planning

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Implement our Human Resource Strategy.

→ Human Resource Strategy

The purpose of the Department's Human Resource Strategy is to bring together our various human resource policies, integrate them within the overall organisational strategy and place human resources at the centre of the Department's decision-making. The implementation of the Strategy is monitored via the Management Board and the Department's Partnership process.

→ Devolution of responsibility to line managers

As part of the preparations for devolution of greater responsibility and authority to line managers, sources of information and advice for managers continue to be developed. A new Employee Assistance Service (EAS) intranet site was set up in 2007 to provide information on a wide range of topics within the positive working environment, namely promotion of equality, provision of supports for staff with disabilities, promotion of health awareness, enforcement of the Anti-Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying policy and the work of the Employee Assistance Service.

→ Exploiting technology options

In 2005, the Centre for Management and Organisational Development (CMOD), the training and development unit of the Department of Finance, engaged consultants to establish a managed services environment to provide for the future support and development of the Human Resource Management (HRM) system. The Department moved to managed services in 2006 and performance of the systems continued to be monitored in 2007 to ensure that the Department's business needs in this area are being met. Additional Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) functionality was made available on the HRM system in early 2007 and this is currently being used to capture PMDS statistics. The facility to record staff pensions data was also made available during the year and is in use in the Department.

→ Time and Attendance

A project to implement a new Time and Attendance System commenced in late 2006/early

2007. The project team was trained in the various functional areas of the system. Comprehensive testing was conducted before acceptance for implementation to a live environment. The pilot sites identified for implementation of the system are Personnel, Castlebar local office and Dundalk (local office, regional office and headquarters). Piloting of the system commenced in Personnel in October 2007, with an initial phase that included 24 staff. The system continues to be monitored and will be rolled out to Castlebar local office in early 2008. It is expected that a full review of the pilot sites will be finalised in mid-2008 which will result in recommendations being made to Senior Management on the roll-out of the system across the Department.

→ Staff merit awards

There are two such award systems in the Department at present:

Fiúntas

The Fiúntas Scheme is an exceptional performance award scheme designed to increase staff motivation, to recognise exceptional performance, to encourage fresh input and foster a climate of change. Awards are publicised in the staff magazine. In 2007, a total of 115 awards were made to 62 individuals and 53 teams across a wide range of areas of the Department.

INPUT Staff Suggestion scheme

In 2007, 351 suggestions were received under the INPUT scheme. This represents an increase of 4% over the number of suggestions received in 2006. A total of 62 suggestions received awards during 2007 and there were savings of €131,000 achieved from implemented suggestions. In 2007, the Department's 'Idea of the Year' award was made for suggested improvements to the Back to Work explanatory leaflet and application form.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Provide a positive working environment and, in line with equality legislation, promote equality of opportunity for all employees of the Department.

→ Employee Assistance Service

The Employee Assistance Service is an important organisational resource in supporting the Department in its duty of care to its employees. Developments in the Service in 2007 included:

- developing greater co-ordination between Personnel and the Employee Assistance Service;
- the development of an Employee Assistance Section of the HR intranet site which, in addition to providing information about the Service, also provides information on a wide range of health and welfare topics; and
- the use of the Employee Assistance Service as an organisational resource in supporting policies on Health Promotion, Bullying and Harassment, Equality and Disability.

→ Anti-harassment, sexual harassment and bullying policy

The anti-harassment, sexual harassment and bullying policy was revised in 2005 to reflect developments at national and EU level as well as taking on board the experience gained within the civil service in operating the policy. The revised policy places a greater emphasis on formal mediation as the preferred means of resolving allegations of this nature rather than immediately going into the full investigation process, and the Department is in the process of having a number of mediators trained to assist in this. Seminars to raise awareness and knowledge of the area of bullying and harassment have been held for staff.

→ Health Development programme

The Department is committed to developing health promotion initiatives, which are intended to generate greater awareness of the benefits of health maintenance through lifestyle choices such as exercise, diet, stress management and health screening. During 2007, a number of initiatives

were undertaken, which included supporting AWARE's Harbour to Harbour walk, the Irish Cancer Society's Pink Ribbon Day and Daffodil Day. In addition, a Health Promotion Section of the HR intranet site was launched in November and includes a wide range of information and literature on healthy lifestyle choices. In December 2007, the Department circulated a booklet *Your Personal Nutrition and Exercise Planner* to all staff, which provided advice on health and well-being including exercise and diet; and is also available in download format from the HR intranet site.

→ Promotion of work-life balance for all employees

The Department has a very good record of promoting and implementing a range of work-life balance arrangements which allow people to balance work and other responsibilities in a way which suits their circumstances. At the end of 2007, 22% of staff were worksharing and 10% of staff availed of the term-time scheme during the summer. The Department's aim is to operate these arrangements in a fair and reasonable way and to the greatest extent possible, taking into account the imperative to always provide a high standard of service to the public.

Supports for staff with disabilities

The Department's Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act was published in July 2006. It included a range of commitments aimed at meeting the needs of its staff with disabilities, in line with the provisions of Part 5 of the Act. Measures taken to meet those commitments in 2007 included providing work experience under the Willing and Mentoring Programme, providing training courses to specific groups of staff with disabilities and also training on mental health to certain areas of the Department. A survey on the number of staff with a disability employed by the Department was undertaken in 2007. The survey was based on self-disclosure and all staff members were requested to participate. The survey results were included in a report published by the National Disability Authority (NDA). The Department's Disability Monitoring Committee

co-ordinated the survey results in respect of the public bodies under the aegis of the Department and reported directly to the NDA.

→ Ability Awards

The O2 Ability Awards are made to Irish organisations which demonstrate best practice in the employment and inclusion of people with disabilities. In 2007, the Department was successful in winning awards in six categories, i.e. Leadership, Environmental Accessibility, Customer Service, Recruitment and Selection, Learning, Development and Progression, and Retention and Wellbeing.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Foster good industrial and employee relations throughout the Department.

→ Stable industrial relations

A stable industrial relations climate was maintained during 2007 through the operation of the formal industrial relations machinery and through continuous communication and consultation with staff unions and associations.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Ensure that each staff member has the knowledge, skills and competencies to contribute effectively to achieving the business goals of the Department and develop the role of the manager as the key facilitator in implementing change and improvement.

→ Integration of the Performance Management and Development System

General Council Report 1452, which was published in 2005, set out how the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) would be integrated with the increment, promotion and higher scale human resource processes and how it would also have linkages with the probation process. Under the agreement, the PMDS integrated model went live from January 2007. It is now used

for actual decisions in relation to increments, promotions and assignments to higher scales. During 2007, the Department continued to update staff about PMDS and work commenced on the development of on-line forms. The implementation of PMDS is monitored by the Human Resources Committee and a PMDS Board which includes Partnership representatives.

→ Staff development and training

The personal development and training plans, developed under the Performance Management and Development System, are the primary mechanism of submitting training requests to Staff Development Unit (SDU). During 2007, SDU delivered 390 courses to over 3,000 staff. In addition to formal training courses, SDU continued to actively promote on-the-job training and coaching and to make available self-managed learning options with some 400 requests for material received and dealt with through the SDU Learning Centre. Over 600 staff accessed 165 courses on the e-learning NetG site.

→ Refund of Fees

During 2006/2007, some 180 staff availed of the Refund of Fees scheme. This scheme allows staff to recoup fees in respect of a range of courses completed at third level and other institutions.

→ Training and development initiatives

The following training and development initiatives were introduced during 2007:

- a *Dealing with non-English Speaking Customers* course has been made available to all front-line staff in the Department. In addition the *Communications for Services Officers* course deals with customer service, diversity and how to deal with customers with low English-language skills;
- a *Facilitated Problem Solving Service* which helps staff to examine and resolve critical business issues was initiated; and
- a *Managing in a Coaching Style* series of workshops were held.

In addition, a major international conference was held in the Department in 2007, the purpose of which was to assess the impact of Action Learning in organisations.

→ Supports to decentralising staff

During 2007, SDU continued to support the Decentralisation Programme, in particular providing training to staff in the decentralised sections in Sligo and Carrick-on-Shannon.

→ Excellence Through People

In 2007, SDU retained accreditation at the Excellence Through People, Gold Level - the FÁS National Standard for Human Resource Management. In addition, SDU assisted a number of other offices to achieve standard accreditation.

→ Access Officers

Under the Disability Act 2005, the Department is required to have in place Access Officers to provide assistance and guidance for people with disabilities in accessing services and procedures in relation to the making and investigation of complaints from people with disabilities. The Department designated Access Officers and Inquiry Officers and initiated training for those officers in 2007.

→ Other training initiatives

Training to front-line staff is key to ensuring the delivery of quality customer service. The Regional Director's Office devised and delivered training programmes to support decision-making in relation to the new initiative on the assessment of means and the localisation of the Third Level Allowance and One-Parent Family schemes. In addition, training was delivered on 43 job-specific training courses to 721 regional staff during 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Ensure a working environment which is based on co-operation, participation and mutual support.

→ Partnership

The Department recognises that effective delivery of our services and management of our work requires a partnership approach between management, unions and staff. The Department's Partnership Steering Committee, which met on nine occasions in 2007, is responsible for promoting and fostering the development of Partnership in the Department. In addition, under the current Social Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016*, the Partnership Steering Committee agreed the Department's Modernisation Action Plan and considered the various reports on progress in implementing the Plan.

→ Internal Customer Service

A Working Group was set up in 2007 to compile the Department's third Internal Customer Service Plan 2008 - 2010. The objective of this Plan is to encourage and promote the highest standards of internal customer service. The Working Group includes representatives from a cross-section of grades and geographical locations as well as from the main support and service delivery areas.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Operate, maintain and enhance the Department's Information Technology production systems.

→ Claims and applications

The Central Records System was extended in 2007 to take additional data on PRSI class changes from Revenue. Staff of the IT Division participated at EU level in the preparation of a draft IT architecture to support the electronic exchange of data between member states.

→ Business continuity

Payments to customers were made on schedule throughout the year and the increases announced in Budget 2007 were paid to customers on time. Amendments required to the computer systems to enable payment of half-rate Carer's Allowance in September were implemented on time, as was the extension of the duration of Maternity Benefit in May 2007.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Develop and enhance ICT systems to respond to the requirements of the Department's change agenda.

→ ICT systems enhancements

The following systems enhancements were initiated in 2007:

- a project with Reach to move the transmission of life-event data (e.g. births, from the General Register Office) from the Inter-Agency Messaging Service platform to the more robust Public Service Broker platform;
- a pilot project to deliver additional automation to the customer registration and Personal Public Service Number allocation procedures provided at local offices;
- a data matching service in support of the Core Functions Transfer Programme; and
- the first request for tenders relating to phase 3 of the Service Delivery Modernisation programme was issued and a preferred contractor selected.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure the governance arrangements of the Department and its agencies are appropriate to achieve the task which must be undertaken.

→ Management Board and Sub-Committees

The Department's Management Board, chaired by the Secretary General, meets twice monthly with the Minister attending one meeting each month. Matters discussed at these meetings focus on major policy and strategic business issues. The Management Board is supported by a number of Sub-Committees including those whose focus is on Policy, Human Resources and Project Governance. In addition, the Social Welfare Services Top Management Team meets every two weeks.

→ DSFA Audit Committee

The Department's Audit Committee, which operates under a written charter and whose membership of six includes three external members (including the Chairperson) is an integral part of the Department's governance processes. The Committee met on four occasions in 2007 and provided guidance and advice to the Department in relation to business control, internal audit, decentralisation of the Department's internal audit unit, risk management and other governance issues.

→ The Citizens Information Board

The Citizens Information Board is the national support agency responsible for supporting the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy on social services. The Board is funded by a grant from the Department. The Department works closely with, and is represented on, the Citizens Information Board which submits an annual report to the Minister to be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Chairperson

of the Board reports to the Minister with regard to a number of matters in accordance with the relevant sections of the Department of Finance's Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The Board's accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General each year.

→ The Combat Poverty Agency

The Department works closely with the Combat Poverty Agency on a number of levels including monitoring the Agency's implementation of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The Minister has appointed an official from the Department of Social and Family Affairs to the Combat Poverty Agency Board. The Agency submits an annual report to the Minister on its activities and its annual accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Board's annual report and its strategic plans are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

→ Family Support Agency

The Family Support Agency was established on 6 May 2003 under the Family Support Agency Act 2001, to bring together the main programmes and family services introduced by the Government in recent years. Its main aim is to support families, promote continuity and stability in family life and prevent marital breakdown, and to foster a supportive community environment for families at local level. The Agency is overseen by a Board consisting of members with experience and expertise in fields such as family mediation, the Family Resource Centre programme, counselling, research, and family law. The Department is represented on the Board and on sub-groups of the Board, including its audit committee. The Family Support Agency submits an annual report to the Minister and its accounts are audited on a yearly basis and verified by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

→ Pensions Board

The Department works closely with the Pensions Board on the development of pensions policy. In 2007, the Board provided major input into the

development of the *Green Paper on Pensions*. The Department is represented on the Board and also participates in the work of the various groups appointed by it to oversee and advance its work in particular areas. The Pensions Board is mainly financed by fees levied on pension schemes and providers of Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs). The Board submits an annual report to the Minister on its activities and its accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General each year.

→ Pensions Ombudsman

The Pensions Ombudsman is empowered to investigate complaints from beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries of pension schemes and PRSAs. He is independent in the performance of his functions. The Pensions Ombudsman submits an annual report to the Minister on his activities, together with proposals for change that he considers appropriate to facilitate investigations and to make determinations. The accounts of his office are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

→ The Money Advice and Budgeting Service

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) provides assistance to people who are over-indebted and need help and advice in coping with debt problems. There are 52 independent companies nationwide delivering the service. Each MABS company is an independent legal entity, being a company limited by guarantee with a Board of Directors drawn from local voluntary and statutory services and community groups. The service is funded by the Department and in 2007, €17.6 million was provided to fund the MABS. The funding of each MABS company is done by way of a renewable 3-year contract with the Department. Under the provisions of this contract each company is required to provide the Department with quarterly financial accounts, employ an independent firm of auditors and submit fully audited and certified accounts not later than three calendar months from the end of each calendar year.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Ensure the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) is implemented in the Department.

→ Modernisation Action Plan

The Modernisation Action Plan was agreed at the end of 2006 in the context of the Social Partnership Agreement *Towards 2016*. The Plan builds on the programme of change and modernisation which the Department undertook under the previous agreement *Sustaining Progress*. The reporting process required to meet commitments to the Civil Service Performance Verification Group (CSPVG), in accordance with the terms of *Towards 2016*, ensure that progress is reviewed on a regular basis and the CSPVG have been satisfied with the progress achieved to date.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Ensure that the Department maintains a robust system of internal control and arrangements to evaluate same and that the principles of efficiency, effectiveness and economy are applied in all the Department's activities.

→ Internal audit of control processes

The robustness of internal control processes was subjected to continuous reviews during 2007. All significant control and governance issues and recommendations brought to attention by internal and external audit and other internal reviews were responded to by management and improvements implemented as appropriate. During 2007, the Department's Internal Audit Unit provided audit reports, reviews and other audit activities in respect of many aspects of the Department's business environment including schemes, head office areas and local offices. It engaged the services of a specialist IT audit provider to provide audit assistance and specialist audit expertise within the Department's IT and computer areas.

→ Payment and Agency Reconciliation Project

The objective of the Payment and Agency Reconciliation Project is to provide an integrated reconciliation solution which will reconcile all the Department's payment instruments and associated agency accounts and will integrate with the Department's financial and payment systems. The Department selected a solution provider in 2007 and the project's implementation phase commenced in December 2007.

→ Project Governance

The Department's Project Governance Committee (PGC) which meets monthly is chaired by the Director General of Social Welfare Services and includes Management Board members. The Committee manages multi-annual budgets and resource requirements for current and planned projects. The work of the PGC is supported by a robust system of project management and measures to ensure best practice in relation to procurement. Supports available to project managers included information seminars and training together with guidelines and templates which are subject to continuous improvement.

→ Management Information Framework

During 2007, the Management Information Framework Unit concentrated on the delivery of a suite of performance management reports in respect of the Department's regional business activities. These reports contain both financial and non-financial information. They provide managers at various levels with prompt up-to-date data on business activities to enable them to make better informed decisions regarding the running of the business. The data covers resources, activities and outputs. The reports and associated production systems were refined and validation of the underlying data was completed. A business intelligence tool (Business Objects) was put in place to deliver the reports and enable interrogation of the underlying data. The reports were delivered to regional users in July 2007. Appropriate training in the use of Business

Objects to view and query the data was provided. Administration of the reports and ongoing support for new users was put in place. During 2007, work also commenced on the design of top level management reports in respect of activities in other business areas of the Department.

→ Business Process Improvement

During 2007, the brief of the Work Measurement Team within the Department was broadened to include a Business Process Improvement (BPI) dimension. BPI involves an examination of the processes in a business area to see where there is duplication and wasted effort. It uses certain defined techniques that have been proven to work both by industry and the general business world. Process improvement exercises were undertaken in Carers' Allowance and Family Income Supplement sections and the EU part of Child Benefit section.

→ Performance Indicators

As part of its business planning process for 2007, the Department drew up 13 key business objectives in line with the Statement of Strategy for the delivery of social welfare services. Performance indicators were identified and work was undertaken on the reporting of performance under the objectives. These reports were also aligned to the structure of the Annual Output Statement.

→ Review of the organisation and structure of the Department

Work began in 2007 on a review of the organisation and structure of the Department. This takes into account the changes in policies, customer base and the ways in which the customer interacts with the Department. The first phase of the review includes a detailed description of the Department's current structures and the challenges it faces. This will be followed by analysis and recommendations for structuring the Department in the future.

→ Annual Output Statement

The Department produced its first Annual Output Statement (AOS) in 2007. The Statement is structured around programmes of expenditure which are groupings of activities broadly linked to the high level goals in the Statement of Strategy.

The AOS sets out for each programme:

- the relevant high level goal;
- aggregate impact (outcome) indicators for each goal;
- the key strategies employed to achieve the goal (these largely reflect the objectives and activities in the Statement of Strategy);
- a small number of high level output targets for the year; and
- the total budget (including scheme, pay and non-pay and administrative expenditure) and staff numbers employed on the programme.

A copy of the Annual Output Statement is included in **Appendix 5**.

→ Procurement services

An enhanced Corporate Procurement Framework was drafted in 2007 and will be submitted to the Department of Finance as required. The Framework, with particular reference to business rationales and expected benefits, ensures that the Department continues to maximise the potential to deliver value for money in the area of procurement.

Appendix 6 details the Department's projects which have cost in excess of €30 million since their initiation.

→ Performance under Prompt Payment Legislation

The Department complied with the provisions of Prompt Payment Legislation in 2007. In a relatively small number of cases where the statutory limit for payment was exceeded the relevant amount of interest was included in the total payment. In 2007, there were 397 late payments, the value of which amounted to 0.15% of total payments.

Prompt Payment interest paid in 2007 amounted to just over €6,000.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Promote and develop a risk awareness and management culture which will complement and underpin the Department's corporate governance process.

→ Risk Management

A dedicated Risk Management Division has responsibility for promoting and supporting the development of a risk management system in the Department. It provides the necessary technical and administrative support and guidance to enable the business sections understand, identify and manage risk. A comprehensive risk management process was introduced throughout the Department commencing in 2005 and continued throughout 2007. This includes both business and operational risk. As the Department is highly dependent on secure and resilient information and communications technology systems to support business-critical processes, the risk management programme has been expanded to include an information-risk element.

Significant risks are brought to the attention of a high level Risk and Operations Committee on a quarterly basis and issues are escalated to the Management Board, as appropriate. The Risk Management process is now sufficiently robust to support the Department's planning and decision-making process by highlighting priority issues for attention. A range of initiatives were undertaken to enhance the Department's information security capability, including the establishment of a high level group to review all aspects of data management and control.

→ OBJECTIVE 5

Design, develop and implement document and data management strategies for the Department.

→ Document, Record and Information Management

The Document, Record and Information Management (DRIM) programme is a key element of the Department's Modernisation Action Plan. The vision is to have all documents, records and information easily accessible, usable and managed in a manner that satisfies all stakeholders. The intention is to eliminate paper, in so far as is possible, from the administrative process.

Implementation of the DRIM strategy, which was developed to realise the vision, commenced in 2007 and significant progress has already been achieved. A classification scheme or taxonomy was developed to help categorise the Department's information. The taxonomy is a fundamental building block for many service modernisation initiatives and it has already been used in determining the information architecture for the redesign of the Department's website. Use of electronic documents is a key tenet of the DRIM Programme. Scanning and forms-recognition software has been introduced to capture key data and automatically process selected forms in Child Benefit and Household Benefit schemes. This has assisted in the timely processing of customer information and applications in these areas.

→ OBJECTIVE 6

Deliver, in accordance with the timeframe approved by Government, on decentralisation programme.

→ Implementation plan for decentralisation

The roll-out of the Department's decentralisation programme continued during 2007 with 113 posts relocated to Carrick-on-Shannon and a further 48 posts to Sligo - this brought the total of new posts decentralised to Sligo under

the current programme to 66 posts. Some 88 employees transferred from other Government departments to fill vacancies created by the current decentralisation programme. A total of 94 employees of the Department transferred to other Government departments for the purposes of their decentralisation programmes. An information newsletter was published in the first quarter and distributed to all staff within the Department giving a progress update on the programme. The Decentralisation Project Board, chaired by the Director General, met on three occasions during the year to review progress and agree on specific action points to support and progress the programme.

SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKING ENVIRONMENT

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Ensure quality accommodation is provided and is maintained to the highest standard to enable customers/staff to have a clean, comfortable and safe environment.

→ Health and Safety

The health and safety of staff continues to be a priority in the Department and work continued in 2007 to ensure compliance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work and Fire Safety legislation, as follows:

- Health and Safety Advisors have been appointed to each region and a programme of Health and Safety Training, including preparation of risk assessments, has been completed for all the regions. A total of 20 courses has been delivered across all regions which involved almost 500 participants;
- work on completing Safety Statements for buildings and the risk assessment process continues. It is now planned to have all risk assessments completed by end of the first quarter of 2008 and the auditing process will then commence in order to ensure consistency of approach and enable feedback to managers and staff on trends and patterns in the context

of future revisions to safety statements, risk assessments and control measures; and

- the focus for the Department's Health and Safety Week in October was *Mind your Back - Safe Manual Handling*. Courses were also provided on fire safety and the use of evacuation chairs.

→ Disability Access Programme

Fifteen disability access audits have been carried out to date and a further programme of audits was agreed in 2007. The Department continues to work closely with the Office of Public Works on the implementation of the programme.

→ Decentralisation of headquarter staff

Work continued in 2007 on the relocation, under Phase 1 of the decentralisation plan, of sections to Sligo, where an extension of the existing decentralised office was completed. A new building was completed for decentralising staff in Carrick-on-Shannon.

→ Accommodation

During the year a new local office was opened in Bray while refurbishment of the local offices in Finglas, Kilkenny, Navan Road, Dunfanaghy, Newbridge and Drogheda took place.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

→ OBJECTIVE 1

Promote and support an effective, inclusive and consultative policy making process.

→ Consultation

Consultation with stakeholders is a key element of the policy making process within the Department. It is an essential element in addressing policy issues and in determining an

effective response to the needs of customers in the context of a changing economic and social environment. Such consultation, and the development of participative structures where customer representative organisations and stakeholders generally can express views, provide feedback on services delivered. Input into policy making is necessary in order to ensure that income support programmes and associated supports continue to be relevant and effective. The Department facilitates this participative structure through various fora, submissions to Working Groups and through engagement with various customer representative groups.

Following the launch of the Government Discussion Paper *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents*, the Department engaged in an extensive consultation process with representative groups and other parties. As the proposals are being developed, the Department has continued to receive submissions on the proposals and has met the key groups representing lone parents to discuss any issues they may have. It has also presented the proposals at various meetings and conferences around the country and participated in discussions on them. In addition, the Department has met with other relevant departments and agencies with the aim of progressing the proposals in a co-ordinated manner.

→ Green Paper on Pensions

The *Green Paper on Pensions* was published in October 2007, beginning a period of public consultation until mid-2008, in order to give as many people as possible an opportunity to share their views on social welfare and supplementary pension issues. Submissions can be made through the dedicated website – www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie.

→ Regulatory Impact Analysis

Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) requires the Department to consult with relevant stakeholders in advance of introducing primary legislation and significant statutory instruments. RIA ensures that the potential impacts, including costs and benefits, of new regulation or regulatory change are assessed at policy design stage.

See **Appendix 3B** for details of RIAs carried out in the Department in 2007.

→ Pre- and Post-Budget Fora

The 2007 Pre-Budget Forum took place in October 2007. The purpose of this Forum is to give voluntary organisations operating in the social services area an opportunity to express their views, concerns and priorities with regard to social welfare improvements in the run-up to the Budget. Thirty two organisations were invited to attend the Forum. Representatives from the Combat Poverty Agency, the Family Support Agency, the National Disability Authority and the Department of Finance also attended. A representative from each organisation was also invited to attend the Post-Budget Forum which was held on Budget Day, 5 December 2007.

→ Disability Consultative Forum

The Department has, through its Disability Consultative Forum, met with the representative organisations and disability service providers on four occasions in 2007. The Forum was advised on progress in relation to a variety of disability-related issues including the Disability Sectoral Plan, Disability Schemes Policy, Budget changes, the Households Benefits scheme, the half-rate Carer's Allowance, the Statement of Strategy, the Core Functions Project, the Payments Strategy and the Customer Action Plan.

In addition, the Forum was updated on the Department's Payment Strategy and its views were sought on the Department's new Customer Action Plan.

→ Social Protection Committee

EU social protection systems face a series of significant common challenges. In response to these challenges, the EU has established a Social Protection Committee to serve as a vehicle for co-operative exchange of information and views about modernising and improving social protection systems. The Department continued

to actively participate in the Social Protection Committee in 2007.

→ Council of Europe

The European Committee for Social Cohesion has responsibility for developing and implementing the Council of Europe's social cohesion strategy. It set up committees of experts in 2007 to report on social policy for families and children, on improving the situation of low income workers and on empowerment of people experiencing extreme poverty. A High Level Taskforce on social cohesion in the 21st century completed a detailed review of the Council's strategy during 2007 and submitted a report entitled *Towards an Active, Fair and Socially Cohesive Europe* for consideration by the Council's Committee of Ministers.

→ OBJECTIVE 2

Support the development and implementation of responses to cross-departmental issues.

→ Cross-departmental co-operation

The development of policy requires close co-operation with other departments where a particular policy initiative is shared across departments. This co-operation is critical to the achievement of many of the Department's objectives and is manifest in many areas of the Department's activities including the development of proposals arising from the Government Discussion Paper *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents*.

The Department continues to participate in the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Long-Term Care. It has been agreed that the Department will provide the secretariat to the Inter-Departmental Working Group developing the National Carers' Strategy.

→ North/South co-operation

The Department continued to co-operate with the Northern Ireland administration in 2007. The main areas of co-operation included:

- the introduction of an All Ireland Free Travel scheme for pensioners which was launched in April 2007;
- representation on an Information Group which has responsibility for the development of a website providing cross-border mobility information. The website was launched in October 2007 and is accessible at: www.crossbordermobility.info;
- the organisation of seminars on cross-border information needs;
- enhancing cross-border co-operation to combat poverty and social exclusion;
- the organisation of seminars on control; and
- representation on working groups on cross-border control.

→ OBJECTIVE 3

Monitor and evaluate the performance of schemes in meeting their desired objectives.

→ Value for Money

The Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative provides a basis for a systematic analysis of what is being achieved by expenditure in each programme area. Since the launch of the expenditure review initiative in 1997, the Department has completed 22 expenditure reviews. During 2007, work continued on the Review of Social Welfare Payments to Carers and work on the Review of Information Services commenced. A Review of Disability Allowance will begin in 2008.

The recommendations made in completed expenditure/value for money reviews are monitored on an ongoing basis by the Department's Policy Committee. Progress on all expenditure/value for money reviews under the current round, including implementation of recommendations from completed reviews and the impacts achieved as a result, are set out in **Appendix 7**.

→ Supplementary Welfare Allowance

Phase 2 of the Review of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Scheme was published in November 2006. A number of measures were introduced in 2007 to progress implementation of the recommendations of the Review. These included improvements in the qualifying conditions for Rent Supplement to support the transfer to the Rental Accommodation Scheme of Rent Supplement tenants who wish to take up full-time employment and an improved capital assessment method which eased the assessment of capital for SWA purposes.

→ OBJECTIVE 4

Develop DSFA data holdings as a resource supporting policy development and programme evaluation and ensure that our data sources facilitate national developments in social and equality statistics.

→ Data and Statistics Strategy

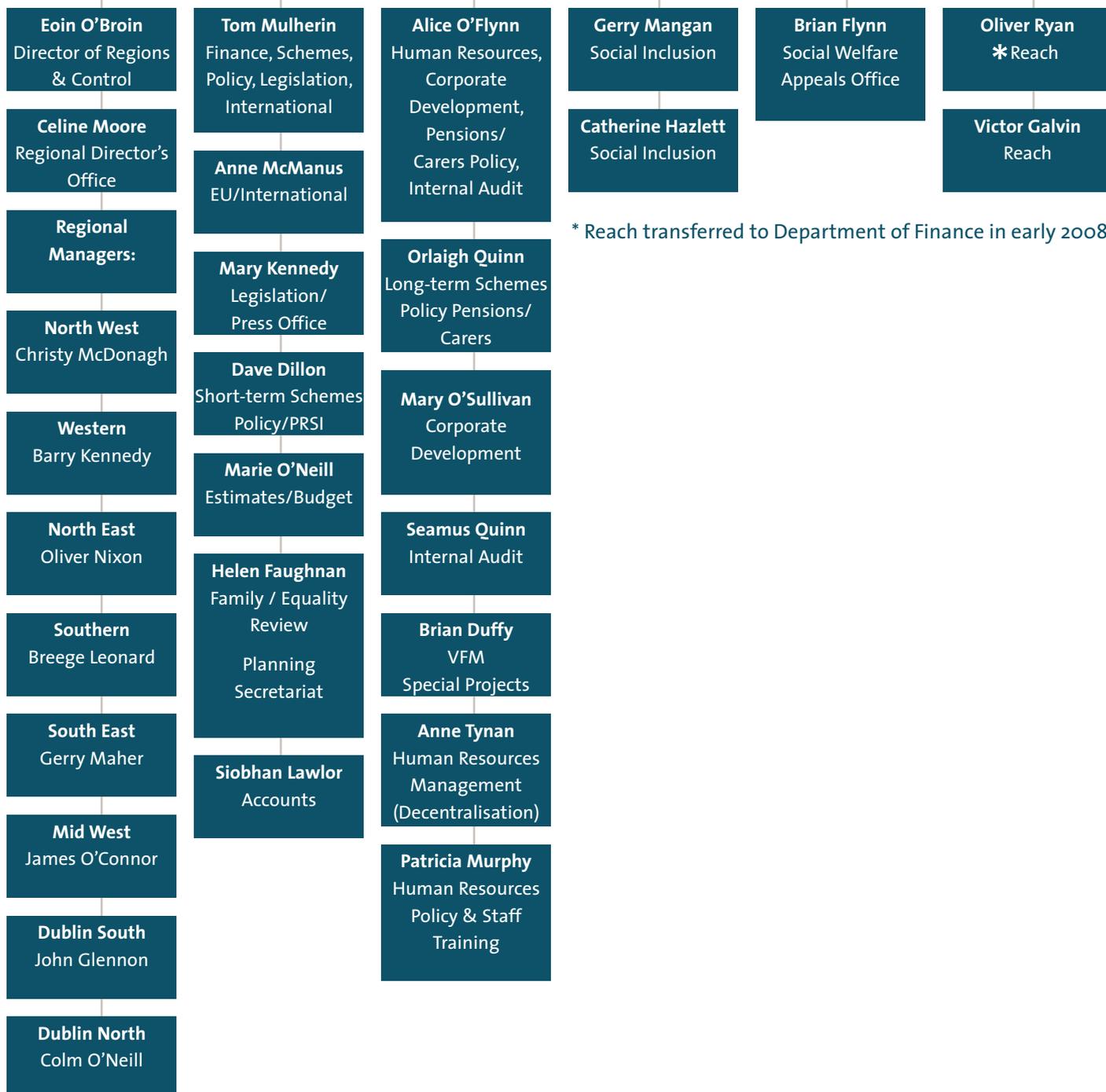
A survey covering the data needs of both policy and operational areas within the Department, with particular focus on data collected in administrative systems, was completed in 2007. The survey findings will feed into the Department's Corporate Data Strategy which will be prepared in 2008.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ORGANISATION STRUCTURE CHART – DECEMBER 2007





* Reach transferred to Department of Finance in early 2008

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS BUDGET PACKAGE 2008

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
1. Lifecycle Stage - Older People	335.95	335.95
2 Lifecycle Stage - Children	124.69	147.92
3 Lifecycle Stage - People of Working Age	375.54	376.71
4 Lifecycle Stage - Carers	37.20	37.72
5 Agencies	3.32	1.70
Total	876.70	900.00
DETAILS OF BUDGET PACKAGE 2008		
Proposal	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
1. Lifecycle Stage - Older People		
Older People - Personal Rates of Payment		
€14 per week increase in the personal rate of payment for all contributory pensioners aged 66 or over (aged 65 in the case of Invalidity Pension) and a €12 per week increase in the rate of payment of the State Pension (Non-Contributory) with proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced rates of payment. [January 2008]		
Older People - Qualified Adult Rates of Payment		
A special increase of €27 per week for qualified adults (aged 66 and over) of the State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition) and Invalidity Pension. An increase of €9.30 for State Pension (Contributory) and State Pension (Transition) Qualified Adults aged under 66 years and an increase of €7.90 for the State Pension (Non-Contributory) Qualified Adults aged under 66 years. Proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced rates of payment. [January 2008]		
National Fuel Scheme/Smokeless Fuel Allowance		
Extend the duration of the fuel season by 1 week in April, from 29 weeks to 30 weeks. [April 2008]		
Qualified Adult Increases		
Increase the upper ceiling for entitlement to a tapered Qualified Adult payment for the State Pension (Contributory), the State Pension (Transition) and Invalidity Pension (aged 65) by €20, from €280 to €300 per week. [January 2008]		
Natural Gas Allowance		
Extend entitlement to the Natural Gas Allowance to include customers using gas which is not delivered via the national grid. [January 2008]	335.95	335.95

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS BUDGET PACKAGE 2008 (CONTINUED)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
2. Lifecycle Stage - Children		
Family Income Supplement (FIS) Increase all FIS earnings thresholds by €10 per week per child. [January 2008]		
Child Benefit Increase the Lower Child Benefit Rate by €6 per month and the Higher Rate by €8 per month. New monthly rates are €166 and €203 per month, respectively. [April 2008]		
Qualified Child Increase Increase the rate of Qualified Child Increases by €2 per week, from €22 to €24. [January 2008]		
Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BTSCFA) Increase the rate of payment of BTSCFA by €20 per child; New rates are €200 for children aged between 2 and 11 years old, from €180, and €305 for children aged between 12 and 22, from €285. [June 2008]		
School Meals Scheme Additional funding to extend the School Meals Scheme to a further tranche of schools in the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS) programme. [2008]		
Widowed Parent Grant Increase the Widowed Parent Grant by €2,000, from €4,000 to €6,000. [Budget Day]		
	124.69	147.92

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS BUDGET PACKAGE 2008 (CONTINUED)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
3. Lifecycle Stage - People of Working Age		
Working Age - Personal Rates of Payment		
€12 increase in the personal rate of all working age payments with proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced rates. [January 2008]		
Working Age - Qualified Adult Rates of Payment		
€8.60 per week increase for Invalidity Pension qualified adults aged under 66; €8 per week increase for all other qualified adults of working age schemes with proportionate increases for all persons in receipt of reduced rates. [January 2008]		
Maternity and Adoptive Benefit		
€14 per week increase in the minimum rate of Maternity and Adoptive Benefit from €207.80 to €221.80 per week. [January 2008]		
One-Parent Family Payment (OPFP)		
Increase the upper income threshold for entitlement to OPFP by €25, from €400 to €425 per week. [May 2008]		
Disregard social insurance contributions, health contributions, superannuation contributions and trade union subscriptions for the purpose of assessment of earnings for One-Parent Family Payment. [May 2008]		
Jobseeker's Allowance/Supplementary Welfare Allowance		
Introduce a single reformed method for assessing the value of Benefit and Privilege from parents' income. [April 2008]		
Qualified Adult Increases		
Increase the upper ceiling for entitlement to a tapered Qualified Adult payment for Jobseeker's Benefit, Illness Benefit, Injury Benefit and Health and Safety Benefit by €20, from €280 to €300 per week. [January 2008]		
Cost of Education Allowance		
Increase the Cost of Education Allowance by €100, to €500 per annum. [2008]		
Family Support Programme		
Additional funding for the Activation and Family Support Programme. [2008]		
Back to Education Allowance		
Extend entitlement to a Cost of Education Allowance of €500 to Back to Education credit-only cases. [2008]		
Illness Benefit		
Enable Illness Benefit claimants transferring from Invalidity Pension to qualify based on their record in the most recent Relevant Tax Year or the Relevant Tax Year applicable when they were last in receipt of Illness Benefit. [May 2008]		
	375.54	376.71

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS BUDGET PACKAGE 2008 (CONTINUED)

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
4. Lifecycle Stage - Carers		
Carer's - Personal Rates of Payment		
Increase the rate of Carer's Allowance (aged 66 or over) by €14, from €218 to €232 per week and increase the rate of Carer's Allowance (aged under 66) and Carer's Benefit by €14, from €200 to €214 per week and from €200.70 to €214.70, respectively. [January 2008]		
Respite Care Grant		
Increase the Respite Care Grant by €200, from €1,500 to €1,700 for each care recipient. [June 2008]		
Carer's Allowance		
Increase the income disregard from €320 (single)/€640 (couple) per week to €332.50 (single)/€665 (couple) per week; increases of €12.50 and €25 per week, respectively. [April 2008]		
Carer's Benefit/Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement		
Disregard, for the purposes of Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement, any amount of Carer's Benefit in excess of the basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate. [April 2008]		
Carer's Benefit		
Increase the earnings threshold for entitlement to Carer's Benefit by €12.50 per week, from €320 to €332.50. [April 2008]		
	37.20	37.72

**APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS
BUDGET PACKAGE 2008 (CONTINUED)**

	COST	
	First Year €m	Full Year €m
5. Agencies		
Money Advice and Budgeting Service		
Additional funding for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) for the following:		
• MABS Network - Funding for 4 additional staff in the MABS companies; and		
• Training and Development for MABS Voluntary Boards of Management and money advice staff.		
[2008]		
Family Support Agency		
Additional funding for the Family Support Agency (FSA) for the following:		
• to enable the FSA to initiate two additional once-off research projects;		
• to enable the FSA to relocate and furnish the FMS offices in Galway and Sligo during 2008;		
• to provide additional funding to organisations providing marriage and family counselling, including the professional development and up-skilling of counselling staff; and		
• FSA contribution for a pilot project involving Foróige youth workers in Family Resource Centres in the North-West.		
[2008]		
Citizens Information Board		
Additional funding for CIB:		
• to improve services; and		
• for once-off furnish costs of the new CIB head office.		
[2008]		
	3.32	1.70
Overall Total	876.70	900.00

APPENDIX 3: LEGISLATION ENACTED IN 2007

The Department's Legislation Programme for 2007 encompassed the enactment of three pieces of primary legislation, namely:

- the Citizens Information Act 2007;
- the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007; and
- the Social Welfare Act 2007.

The Programme also entailed the promulgation of 49 Statutory Instruments.

Details of the primary and secondary legislation are as follows:

CITIZENS INFORMATION Act 2007 (No. 2 of 2007 enacted 21 February 2007)

The Citizens Information Act was commenced in April 2007 and with the exception of Section 5 and parts of Section 4 of the Act which deals with the introduction of the personal advocacy service, all Sections of the Act are now in force. The Act is a key element of the Government's National Disability Strategy. The Act enables the Citizens Information Board;

- to support and promote the provision of advocacy services for people with disabilities, that would assist them in identifying and understanding their needs and in securing their entitlements to social services; and
- to introduce a personal advocacy service for certain people with disabilities, who would otherwise have difficulty in getting access to social services. It also provides for matters such as eligibility for the assignment of a personal advocate, the arrangements for the administration of the service and for an independent appeals process for people with disabilities who are dissatisfied with the decision in relation to their eligibility for the assignment of a personal advocate.

Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 (No. 8 of 2007 enacted 30 March 2007)

This Act provides for the implementation of certain social welfare improvements announced in Budget 2007. These include increases in Child Benefit, the One-Parent Family Payment income limit and the Respite Care Grant. It also provides for enhancements to the Illness Benefit, Maternity Benefit, Adoptive Benefit and Supplementary Welfare Allowance schemes.

The Act further provides for the introduction of a special rate of Carer's Allowance which, in specified circumstances, is payable simultaneously with certain other social welfare payments.

In addition, the Act provides for a number of miscellaneous amendments to the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 and for a number of amendments to the Pensions Act 1990 in relation to Occupational Pensions and Retirement Annuity Contracts.

The Act also provides for amendments to the Combat Poverty Agency Act 1986, Family Support Agency Act 2001 in relation to attendance before the Public Accounts Committee, and the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in relation to employment data.

SOCIAL WELFARE ACT 2007 (No. 40 of 2007 enacted 20 December 2007)

The Act provides for increases in the rates of social insurance and social assistance payments and improvements in Family Income Supplement and Widowed Parent Grant.

It also provides for an increase in the weekly earnings limit below which PRSI is not payable, an increase in the income ceiling above which PRSI contributions are not payable by employed or optional contributors, as announced in the Budget, in addition to changes to the Health Contributions Act 1979 to provide for an increase in the weekly and annual exemption thresholds for the Health Contribution Levy.

**S.I. No. 30 of 2007
OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES
(REVALUATION) REGULATIONS 2007**

Section 33 of the Pensions Act, 1990 (as amended by Section 21 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act, 2002), provides that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, after consultation with the Minister for Finance, shall, in respect of each revaluation year, make Regulations specifying the percentage which shall determine the amount by which preserved pension benefit is to be increased in that year. This Regulation provides for a revaluation percentage of 4% for 2006.

**S.I. No. 43 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS
PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (JOBSEEKER'S
BENEFIT) (REDUNDANCY - EXEMPTION FROM
DISQUALIFICATION) REGULATIONS 2007**

Section 68 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 provides that a person under age 55 who receives moneys in respect of redundancy in excess of a prescribed amount may be disqualified for receiving Jobseeker's Benefit for a period of up to nine weeks. These Regulations increase the amount prescribed for the purpose of this disqualification by over €30,000 to €50,000.

**S.I. No. 44 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED
SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE)
(AMENDMENT) (DIET SUPPLEMENT AND
MAXIMUM RENTS) REGULATIONS 2007**

These Regulations provide for revised rates of diet supplement under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. These Regulations also provide for the continuation until 30 June 2008 of the levels of maximum rent, as set out in Schedule C, in respect of which rent supplement is paid. The Health Service Executive may, in respect of subdivisions of its functional areas set levels below that provided for in these Regulations.

**S.I. No. 91 of 2007
PERSONAL RETIREMENT SAVINGS ACCOUNTS
(DISCLOSURE) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2007**

Schedules A and C of the Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSA) (Disclosure) Regulations provide for the Preliminary Disclosure Certificate and the Statement of Reasonable Projection for PRSAs. These Regulations now amend both the Disclosure Certificate and the Statement of Reasonable Projection, to reflect the change in the name of the Old Age (Contributory) Pension to State Pension (Contributory) where appropriate.

These Regulations also amend Schedules A and C to the 2002 Regulations to reflect the enactment of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 which replaces the 1993 (Consolidation) Act.

**S.I. No. 102 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED OCCUPATIONAL
INJURIES) REGULATIONS 2007**

These Regulations consolidate the regulatory provisions governing Occupational Injuries Benefits, relating to –

- Occupational Injuries;
- Prescribed Diseases; and
- general provisions for Claims and Payments.

**S.I. No. 128 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED PAYMENTS
PROVISIONS) (AMENDMENT) (NO. 1) (MATERNITY
BENEFIT AND MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS)
REGULATIONS 2007**

These Regulations provide for the extension of the duration of payment of Maternity Benefit by 4 weeks, consequential on the extension of paid Maternity Leave. In addition, the Regulations provide for a technical amendment by inserting at Article 88E a means disregard of €1,270 in relation to the harvesting of seaweed, for the Jobseeker's Allowance and pre-Retirement Allowance schemes.

S.I. No. 136 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS
ACT 2006 (Section 42) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER
2006

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 42 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006 with effect from 2nd April 2007. Section 42 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006 inserts a new Section 51A into the Pensions Act, 1990. Section 51A provides that the Minister may make Regulations requiring the work carried out by a pension scheme actuary to be reviewed to ensure that it complies with the provisions of the Pensions Act and any Regulations made under the Act. Section 51A further provides that the review shall be carried out in accordance with professional guidance issued by the Society of Actuaries in Ireland.

S.I. No. 137 of 2007
OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (REVIEW OF
ACTUARIAL WORK) REGULATIONS 2007

Section 51A of the Pensions Act 1990 (inserted by Section 42 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006), provides that the Minister may make Regulations requiring the work carried out by a scheme actuary to be reviewed to ensure that it complies with the provisions of the Pensions Act and any professional guidance issued by the Society of Actuaries in Ireland. Section 51A further provides that such professional guidance must contain provisions relating to certain matters including the appointment of a reviewing actuary, the frequency of reviews, and the timescale for reviews. These Regulations now bring into effect, from the 2nd April 2007, the requirement that an actuary to a scheme have his or her actuarial work reviewed for compliance with the Pensions Act and in accordance with the professional guidance issued by the Society of Actuaries in Ireland.

S.I. No. 141 of 2007
CITIZENS INFORMATION ACT 2007
(COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 1, 2 and 4 (except insofar as it provides for the substitution of paragraph (bb) in Section 7

(1) of the Comhairle Act, 2000), and Sections 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Citizens Information Act 2007.

These Sections amend the Comhairle Act 2000 to include definitions of 'disability' and 'social service' in that Act, reduce the size of the Board from 20 to 15 members, change the quorum for Board meetings and extend the term of office of membership of the Board from 3 to 5 years. Section 8 of the Citizens Information Act, 2007 amends Section 23 of the Comhairle Act, 2000 to clarify the reporting responsibilities of the Chief Executive before the Public Accounts Committee.

Section 9 makes provision for the Minister to issue general policy directions to the Board with regard to the performance of its functions. The provisions of Section 4 of the Citizens Information Act, 2007 commenced under this Order are those provisions which confer new functions on the Board to do with enhanced provision of information services, including a statutory requirement on the Board to set terms and conditions for provision of funding to voluntary bodies.

S.I. No. 142 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL PROVISIONS)
REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations consolidate the regulatory provisions relating to –

- all of the social insurance payments other than Occupational Injuries Benefits (Part 2);
- all of the social assistance payments, other than Supplementary Welfare Allowance (Part 3);
- Child Benefit (Part 4);
- Respite Care Grant (Part 5);
- Family Income Supplement (Part 6);
- related provisions governing the making of claims and payments (Part 7) including –
 - loss of purchasing power;
 - absence from state and imprisonment;
 - overlapping payments – provisions which set out the circumstances in which a person may receive more than one social welfare payment at the same time;
 - Island Allowance;
- control provisions (Part 8);
- overpayments (Part 9); and
- Liable Relatives (Part 10).

S.I. No. 146 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007
(SECTION 35) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007

This Order provides for the commencement, with effect from the first week in April 2007, of Sections 35(a)(ii), 35(a)(iii), 35(b)(ii), 35(c)(ii) and 35(c)(iii) of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007, which remove obsolete means-related provisions.

S.I. No. 148 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT)
(CARER'S INCOME DISREGARD AND FAMILY
INCOME SUPPLEMENT) REGULATIONS 2007

Social Welfare legislation currently provides that a person in receipt of Carer's Benefit may engage in employment or self-employment, subject to a maximum of 15 hours per week and an income ceiling of €290. Article 4 of these Regulations increases the income ceiling to €320 per week, effective from 5th April 2007.

These Regulations further provide for an increase in the income disregarded for the purposes of Carer's Allowance. In the case of a single person, the increase is €30 per week, bringing the total amount of the disregard to €320. In the case of a couple, the disregard is increased by €60 per week, to a new total of €640. These changes take effect from 5th April 2007.

In addition, these Regulations provide for the assessment of rental income in determining the income of a family for the purposes of Family Income Supplement.

S.I. No. 176 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT) (No. 1)
(MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations correct a printing error in the citation of the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) Regulations and the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) (Amendment) (Carer's Income Disregard and Family Income Supplement) Regulations 2007.

S.I. No. 181 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007
(SECTION 37) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 37 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 with effect from the 27th April 2007.

S.I. No. 182 of 2007
TRUST RACS (DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION)
REGULATIONS 2007

Section 54 of the Pensions Act, 1990, as amended by Section 37 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007, provides that the trustees of large trust RACs must make prescribed information available to their members. These Regulations prescribed the information to be made available. The information is similar to that which is required to be made available by the trustees of large defined contribution occupational pension schemes.

S.I. No. 183 of 2007
PENSIONS OMBUDSMAN REGULATIONS 2007

The Pensions (Amendment) Act 2002 inserted Part XI into the Pensions Act 1990. Under Part XI, the office of the Pensions Ombudsman was established to deal with complaints regarding occupational pension schemes and PRSAs. Section 37 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 has extended the jurisdiction of the Pensions Ombudsman to include trust RACs other than trust RACs which invest only in life assurance policies. These Regulations now amend the Pensions Ombudsman Regulations 2003 so as to apply them to trust RACs other than trust RACs which invest in life assurance policies.

S.I. No. 184 of 2007
TRUST RACS (CROSS-BORDER) REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations provide for:

- the disclosure of information provisions of the Pensions Act to be applied to Irish-based members of overseas trust RACs;
- the information required when an application for authorisation of a trust RAC to operate cross-border is submitted to the Board;
- additional conditions of authorisation for trust RACs; and

- the information required to be submitted to the Pensions Board once a trust RAC proposes to accept contributions from a foreign employer.

These Regulations apply to trust RACs. Similar Regulations have already been made in relation to occupational pension schemes.

**S.I. No. 185 of 2007
TRUST RACS (INVESTMENT) REGULATIONS 2007**

Article 18 of Directive 2003/41/EC on the activities and supervision of Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision (IORPs) requires that the resources of a trust RAC or an occupational pension scheme must be invested in accordance with the prudent person rule and in particular in accordance with certain investment rules. These Regulations implement the requirements of Article 18 of the IORPs Directive in relation to trust based Retirement Annuity Contracts. Similar Regulations were already made in respect of occupational pension schemes.

**S.I. No. 186 of 2007
TRUST RACS (TRUSTEE) REGULATIONS 2007**

Article 9 of Directive 2003/41/EC on the activities and supervision of Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision (IORPs) requires that IORPs registered in Ireland must fulfil a number of minimum conditions, such as being run by people of good repute who have appropriate qualifications and experience. These Regulations provide that the experience and qualifications necessary relate to the investment of the resources of the trust RAC and determine that only one trustee of a relevant trust RAC need possess such experience and qualifications to satisfy the requirements for all trustees of that trust RAC. Similar Regulations have already been made in relation to occupational pension schemes.

**S.I. No. 187 of 2007
TRUST RACS (REGISTRATION) REGULATIONS 2007**

Section 60 of the Pensions Act 1990, as amended by Section 37 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007, provides for a system of registration of trust RACs. Trustees are required to register trust RACs under their control with the Pensions

Board within a specified period. These Regulations prescribe the information to be furnished to the Board for the purposes of registration.

**S.I. No. 188 of 2007
OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (INVESTMENT) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2007**

These Regulations amend the Occupational Pension Schemes (Investment) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 294 of 2006) by clarifying that the investment rules in Article 6(4) of the 2006 Regulations apply on an individual member basis as well as a scheme basis, except for a one member arrangement. Assets attributable to individual scheme members must be predominantly invested in regulated markets as well as the assets of the scheme as a whole. This statutory instrument does not apply to one member arrangements.

**S.I. No. 219 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007
(SECTIONS 5, 8, 22, 23 and 28) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007**

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 5, 8, 22, 23 and 28 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007.

Section 5 provides that where a person, who was in receipt of Illness Benefit for a period of two years, has engaged in employment for less than 26 weeks and finds that he or she is unable to continue to work, re-applies for Illness Benefit, payment will be re-instated without the requirement to serve waiting days, and payment will not be made at a rate lower than that which the person previously received.

Section 5 also provides that a former recipient of Illness Benefit who transfers to Carer's Benefit or Carer's Allowance and subsequently back to Illness Benefit, may receive Illness Benefit at a rate not lower than that previously in payment.

The Section further provides for a technical amendment in relation to those transferring from Injury Benefit to Illness Benefit and removes an obsolete reference to the term 'rules of behaviour'. This Section came into effect from 1 May 2007.

Section 8 makes provision for a former recipient of Jobseeker's Benefit who transfers to Carer's Benefit or Carer's Allowance and subsequently back to Jobseeker's Benefit to receive Jobseeker's Benefit at a rate not lower than that previously in payment. This Section came into effect from 1 May 2007.

Section 22 provides for an increase in the upper earnings limit for customers in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment from €375 to €400 per week. This Section came into operation on 3 May 2007.

Section 23 provides for the introduction of a transitional reduced-rate payment to a woman whose entitlement to Deserted Wife's Benefit ceases because her earnings have exceeded the prescribed upper limit (€20,000). This Section came into operation on 3 May 2007.

Section 28(a) provides for increasing the annual Respite Care Grant from €1,200 to €1,500 with effect from 7 June 2007.

Section 28(b) provides for the inclusion of training and courses of education in the activities in which a recipient of Respite Care Grant may engage, subject to other criteria, without being disqualified for receipt of Respite Care Grant. This measure came into effect from 1 May 2007.

S.I. No. 221 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED
SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE)
(AMENDMENT) (No. 2) (RENT SUPPLEMENT)
REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations provide for an increase in the maximum amount of Rent Supplement payable to tenants in voluntary housing developments funded through the local authority Capital Assistance Scheme. The maximum amounts are being increased to €55.00 (from €50.00) for a single person and to €60.00 (from €55.00) in the case of a couple.

S.I. No. 222 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT) (No. 2)
(ILLNESS, JOBSEEKER'S, MATERNITY, ADOPTIVE AND
DESERTED WIFE'S BENEFIT) REGULATIONS 2007

Article 4 of these Regulations provides for an improvement in the conditions for receipt of Illness Benefit and Jobseeker's Benefit for a person who was initially in receipt of either benefit payment, but who subsequently transferred to Carer's Benefit or Carer's Allowance and then transfers back to either Illness Benefit or Jobseeker's Benefit. Where it is more beneficial to the person, the rate of Illness Benefit or Jobseeker's Benefit will be restored to the level which was in payment prior to the period during which he or she was in receipt of Carer's Benefit or Carer's Allowance.

Article 5 of these Regulations clarifies the position in relation to disqualification for receipt of Maternity Benefit and Adoptive Benefit by providing that such benefit will not be payable where a person engages in any form of insurable employment or self-employment.

These changes came into effect from 1 May 2007.

Social Welfare legislation currently provides that a woman in receipt of Deserted Wife's Benefit may engage in employment or self-employment, subject to satisfying certain conditions, including income-related conditions. Where a woman earns less than €12,697.38 per annum, she may qualify for the maximum rate of Deserted Wife's Benefit. Current legislation also provides for the payment of reduced rates of Deserted Wife's Benefit where a woman's annual earnings are between €12,697.38 and €17,776.33 per annum. Articles 6 and 7 of these Regulations provide for the abolition of these income limits, and for the introduction of a single annual income limit of €20,000.

These Regulations further provide that where a recipient of Deserted Wife's Benefit has income in excess of the new limit of €20,000, the person may receive a transitional payment, equivalent to half the former rate of Benefit payable, for a period of six months. These amendments took effect from 3 May 2007.

S.I. No. 223 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS, PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT) (No. 3)(PRE-RETIREMENT ALLOWANCE) REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations provide for the phasing out of Pre-Retirement Allowance with effect from 4 July 2007. With effect from that date, there will be no further admissions to the scheme. However, those in receipt of the Allowance on that date will continue to receive payment for the duration of their entitlement.

S.I. No. 256 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007 (SECTIONS 18, 20, 25(1), 35 AND 36) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 18, 20, 25(1), 35(b)(i), 35(c)(i), 35(d) and 36 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007.

Section 18 provides for an improvement in the Bereavement Grant by providing that for the purposes of the Grant, 'qualified child' shall include a person aged between 16 and 22 who is in receipt of Disability Allowance. This Section came into effect from 22 May 2007.

Section 20 provides that where a person who was in receipt of a Widow's or Widower's (Non-Contributory) Pension ceases to be a widow/widower and subsequently qualifies for Jobseeker's Allowance, payment will be made without the requirement to serve the waiting days associated with that allowance. This Section came into effect from 4 July 2007.

Section 25(1) provides that where a person has not been engaged in full-time employment in the previous 12 months and, during that time, is in receipt of Rent Supplement, he or she may continue to receive Rent Supplement if he or she engages in full-time employment, or is participating in a Community Employment or Back to Work scheme, provided that the person is included on a waiting list for accommodation under the Rental Allowance Scheme operated by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

This Section further provides for powers to preclude payment of Rent Supplement under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme where rental accommodation does not meet the required standards, as defined by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Provision is also made for powers to preclude payment of Rent Supplement in designated areas of regeneration.

Section 35(b)(i), 35(c)(i) and 35(d) provides for amendments to the rules governing the means test which is applicable to the social assistance schemes. The amendments include provision for an improvement in the means test applicable to Disability Allowance by increasing the amount of capital which is disregarded, from €20,000 to €50,000.

Section 36 contains a number of enhancements to the means test for entitlement to Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

Sections 25(1), 35(b)(i), 35(c)(i), 35(d) and 36 came into effect on 6 June 2007.

S.I. No. 267 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE) (AMENDMENT) (NO. 3) REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations provide for the removal of the Family Income Supplement disregard in the assessment of means for rent supplement purposes. The removal of this disregard is in the context of improvements in the assessment of additional income for rent supplement purposes as provided for in the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007.

These Regulations also provide for a number of miscellaneous amendments to the Regulations governing Supplementary Welfare Allowance, in advance of the promulgation of new consolidated Regulations for the Scheme.

S.I. No. 268 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007
(SECTION 34) (COMMENCEMENT)
ORDER 2007

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 34 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007. Section 34 provides for the inclusion of the managers of Social Welfare Branch Offices, and their staff, in the categories of persons designated by the Minister to decide claims for certain payments under the social welfare code.

This Section came into effect from 5 June 2007.

S.I. No. 298 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED
CONTRIBUTIONS AND INSURABILITY)
(AMENDMENT) (MODIFIED SOCIAL INSURANCE)
REGULATIONS 2007

People employed in a permanent and pensionable capacity in the civil service, local and public authorities and other public bodies are liable for a modified rate of social insurance (PRSI) contribution. Modified rates of insurance provide cover for a limited range of benefits i.e. Widow(er)'s Pension, Guardian's Payment (Contributory), Carer's Benefit and Bereavement Grant.

In 1996, the modified rate of social insurance was extended to employees of Bord Telecom Eireann (now eircom plc) which, following the formation of a strategic alliance was no longer regarded as a public authority under the Social Welfare code.

These Regulations provide for the continuation of a modified rate of social insurance for persons who, on 5 April 1995 were employed by Eircell 2000 plc and subsequently by Vodafone Group Services Ireland Ltd. under terms and conditions which provide that such persons continue to be employed in a permanent and pensionable capacity and for payment during illness on a basis considered adequate by the Minister.

S. I. No. 412 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED
SUPPLEMENTARY WELFARE ALLOWANCE)
REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations consolidate the regulatory provisions governing the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

S.I. No. 536 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT) (No.
4) (BEREAVEMENT GRANT AND PAYMENTS AFTER
DEATH) REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations outline the circumstances under which an award of Bereavement Grant and six weeks after death payments may be made without the need for formal application or referral to a Deciding Officer for decision. These are –

- where a person in receipt of State Pension (Transition) or State Pension (Contributory) dies and an increase in respect of a qualified adult was in payment to him or her at the date of death or would have been but for the receipt by the spouse of a social welfare payment in his or her own right, or
- where the spouse of a person in receipt of State Pension (Transition) or State Pension (Contributory) dies and an increase was in payment on that pension in respect of him or her at the date of his or her death; or
- in respect of the death of a child where an increase is payable to a person in receipt of State Pension (Transition) or State Pension (Contributory) for that child at the date of his or her death; and

details of the death registration have been notified to the Minister by An tArd Chláraitheoir, or a copy of the death certificate issued in respect of the deceased person in pursuance of the Civil Registration Act 2004 is submitted and the information provided is sufficient to validate the identity of the deceased person.

S.I. No. 631 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE LAW REFORM AND PENSIONS
ACT 2006 (SECTION 39) (COMMENCEMENT)
ORDER 2007

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 39 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006, in so far as it inserts Section 3A into the Pensions Act 1990. The new Section 3A of the Pensions Act 1990 provides an alternative to the prosecution of certain offences under the Act. Section 3A provides that the Pensions Board may notify a person in writing that it is alleged that an offence has been committed and that if, within 21 days of the notice, the person has remedied the offence to the satisfaction of the Pensions Board and paid the appropriate fine, the prosecution will not be instituted. This commencement order took effect from 17 September 2007.

S.I. No. 632 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007
(SECTION 37) (COMMENCEMENT) (No. 2) ORDER
2007

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 37 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007, in so far as it relates to Section 3A of the Pensions Act 1990. Section 37 and Part 2 of Schedule 2 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007, amend Section 3A of the Pensions Act 1990 (as inserted by Section 39 of the Social Welfare Law Reform and Pensions Act 2006) to specify the Sections of the Pensions Act, a contravention of which will warrant the application of an on-the-spot fine. This amendment took effect from 17 September 2007.

S.I. No. 633 of 2007
PENSIONS ACT (NOTICE OF ALLEGED OFFENCE)
REGULATIONS 2007

Section 3A of the Pensions Act 1990 provides that the Pensions Board may notify a person in writing that it is alleged that an offence has been committed and that if, within 21 days of the notice, the person has remedied the offence to the satisfaction of the Pensions Board and paid the appropriate fine, the prosecution will not be instituted. These Regulations provide for the form of the notice to be issued in respect of an alleged

offence and that the amount of such a fine shall be €2,000. These Regulations took effect from 17 September 2007.

S.I. No. 699 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007
(SECTIONS 21 AND 24)
(COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007

This Order provides for the commencement of Sections 21(b), 21(c) and 24 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007.

Sections 21(b) and (c) contain amendments to the legislation governing Pre-Retirement Allowance to ensure that a person currently in receipt of Carer's Allowance who had been in receipt of Pre-Retirement Allowance immediately prior to the beginning of their Carer's Allowance claim will not be prohibited from reverting to Pre-Retirement Allowance in order to benefit from the new arrangements for Carer's Allowance provided for in Section 24 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007, provided that he or she continues to satisfy the qualifying conditions for Pre-Retirement Allowance.

Section 24 provides for the introduction of a new means-tested payment, of up to half the Carer's Allowance rate, which will be payable to carers who may, simultaneously, be in receipt of another social welfare payment, provided they satisfy the qualifying conditions for Carer's Allowance.

These Sections came into effect on and from 27 September 2007.

S.I. No. 700 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT) (NO. 5)
(ASSESSMENT OF EARNINGS) REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations provide for the amendment of the provisions governing the means test for the purposes of Jobseeker's Allowance, Pre-Retirement Allowance, Disability Allowance and Farm Assist and the provisions governing the payment of a partial-rate Carer's Allowance to carers who are qualified adults.

The Regulations remove the current provision

whereby a recipient of Jobseeker's Allowance, Pre-Retirement Allowance, Farm Assist and Disability Allowance shall only be regarded as wholly or mainly maintaining his or her spouse where the spouse's weekly income does not exceed €100 per week. These Regulations also provide for the retention, in certain circumstances, of the current provisions of these schemes in relation to wholly or mainly maintaining a spouse.

The Regulations introduce an earnings disregard of €20 per day where a recipient of Jobseeker's Allowance or Farm Assist engages in insurable employment and is also in receipt of an increase in relation to a qualified child. The current disregard of €12.70 per day, where a recipient of these schemes is engaged in insurable employment and is not in receipt of an increase in respect of a qualified child, is increased to €20 per day.

These Regulations also provide for the disregard of superannuation contributions, social insurance contributions, health contributions and trade union contributions from the assessment of weekly earnings from employment or self-employment of a rehabilitative nature for the purposes of Disability Allowance.

In the case of Jobseeker's Allowance, Pre-Retirement Allowance, Farm Assist and Disability Allowance, Social Welfare legislation currently provides for the disregard of €100 per week, where the spouse works in insurable employment for more than 3 days in the week and of €50 per week, where the spouse works 3 days or less in the week. Earnings in excess of these amounts, as appropriate, are assessed in full.

These Regulations provide for the introduction of an earnings disregard of €20 per day, subject to a maximum of €60 per week, where the spouse of a recipient of Jobseeker's Allowance, Pre-Retirement Allowance, Farm Assist and Disability Allowance engages in insurable employment. 60% of earnings in excess of the amount disregarded are assessed.

These Regulations also provide for the retention of the current assessment provisions in relation to the insurable earnings of a spouse subject to

certain conditions.

These Regulations allow for carers in receipt of a payment under Section 186A of the Principal Act to satisfy the definition of qualified adult and ensure that a payment received under Section 186A is disregarded in calculating the income limit for qualified adults.

The Regulation also provides for a technical amendment to the Principal Regulations.

The Regulations provide for the revocation of Article 221 as the provisions of that article have been subsumed into Section 247 of the Principal Act.

S.I. No. 701 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (BILATERAL AGREEMENT WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM ON SOCIAL SECURITY) ORDER 2007

This Order gives effect to the Bilateral Agreement on social security made between Ireland and the United Kingdom which came into effect from 1 October 2007. The Order provides that the Social Welfare Acts and relevant Regulations will be modified to take account of the provisions of the Agreement.

The primary purpose of the Agreement is to consolidate the terms of earlier Agreements and to modify them to take account of legislative changes that have occurred in both States and in particular to extend their scope to the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Herm and Jethou.

The Agreement provides that periods of insurance or residence in one State may be taken into account, where necessary, by the other State in order to qualify for certain benefits and pensions.

In the case of Ireland the Agreement covers Illness Benefit, Maternity Benefit, Jobseeker's Benefit, Invalidity Pension, State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition), Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension, Guardian's Payment (Contributory) and Bereavement Grant.

The Agreement also contains provisions which allow workers in one State who are sent temporarily by an employer to work in the

territory of the other State, to remain attached to the social security system of the first State for a period of three years.

All previous Agreements as listed are now replaced by this Agreement.

S.I. No. 702 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007
(SECTION 9) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 9 (other than paragraphs (b), (e)(i), (g)(i) and (i) of that Section) of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007.

Section 9 contains an amendment of the provisions governing the means test for the purposes of Jobseeker's Allowance, Pre-Retirement Allowance, Disability Allowance and Farm Assist. The amendment provides that the means of a couple will be halved where the claimant's spouse or partner is in receipt of a social welfare payment in his or her own right, or is participating in certain approved courses.

This Section came into effect on 26 September 2007.

S.I. No. 748 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS)
REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations provide for the payment of a Christmas Bonus to long-term social welfare recipients, equivalent to 100% of their normal weekly payment, subject to a minimum payment of €30.

The bonus payment applies to recipients of:

- Blind Pension;
- Carer's Allowance;
- Carer's Benefit;
- Death Benefit by way of pension;
- Disability Allowance;
- Disablement Pension;
- Farm Assist;
- Guardian's Payment (Contributory and Non-Contributory);

- Invalidity Pension;
- Jobseeker's Allowance in respect of a continuous period of unemployment of at least 15 months;
- One-Parent Family Payment;
- Pre-Retirement Allowance;
- Relevant payments under Section 178(1) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (formerly Deserted Wife's Benefit and Allowance and Prisoner's Wife's Allowance);
- State Pension (Contributory and Non-Contributory);
- State Pension (Transition);
- Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension; and
- Widow's and Widower's (Non-Contributory) Pension.

S.I. No. 749 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE AND PENSIONS ACT 2007
(SECTION 14) (COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007

This Order provides for entitlement to payment of the State Pension Increase for a Qualified Adult directly to the qualified adult, for the duration of the period of entitlement of the State pensioner. This provision will apply to the State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition) and the State Pension (Non-Contributory).

S.I. No. 768 of 2007
TRUST RACs (FEES) REGULATIONS 2007

Section 25 of the Pensions Act 1990, as amended by Section 37 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007, provides for the payment of annual fees by trust RACs to the Pensions Board. These Regulations prescribe the basis for the calculation of fees and the procedure for their collection. The Regulations take effect from 1 January 2008.

S.I. No. 842 of 2007
PENSIONS ACT (DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION)
(AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2007

These Regulations provide for some technical amendments to the Occupational Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 301 of 2006).

**S.I. No. 843 of 2007
PENSIONS (AMENDMENT) ACT 2002 (SECTION 43)
(COMMENCEMENT) ORDER 2007**

This Order provides for the commencement of Section 43 of the Pensions (Amendment) Act 2002 with effect from 31 December 2007. Section 43 provides for the insertion of Section 59D, 59E and 59F into the Pensions Act 1990.

**S.I. No. 844 of 2007
OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES (EXTERNAL
SCHEMES AND SCHEMES WITH EXTERNAL
MEMBERS) (UNITED KINGDOM) (REVOCATION)
REGULATIONS 2007**

These Regulations revoke the Occupational Pension Schemes (External Schemes and Schemes with External Members) (United Kingdom) Regulations 2000 to 2001 which are no longer required as they are superseded by Directive 2003/41/EC on the activities and supervision of Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision.

**S.I. No. 859 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT) (No. 7)
(CHILD BENEFIT) REGULATIONS 2007**

These Regulations provide for amendment to the rules used to determine the person with whom the qualified child resides for the purposes of Child Benefit and as a consequence for the Early Childcare Supplement. It also provides for the extension of Child Benefit to children over the age of 16 who are receiving home schooling.

Article 4 of these Regulations provide that where a child is placed in foster care or with a relative by the Health Services Executive, payment of Child Benefit will transfer to the foster parent.

In order to preserve the birth parents entitlement to Child Benefit where the child has been placed in short-term foster care Article 4 further provides that the payment of Child Benefit to the foster parent will only take effect once the child has been residing with the foster parent for a period of 6 months.

Article 5 provides for the extension of Child Benefit to children over the age of 16 who are receiving home schooling.

Article 6 provides that the payment of the Early Childcare Supplement will follow Child Benefit residency rules subject to the payment being made to the person with whom the child resides for the majority of the quarter. This will permit the foster parent to receive payment of the Early Childcare Supplement.

**S.I. No. 860 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT) (NO.
6) (ENTITLEMENT TO PRO-RATA STATE PENSION)
REGULATIONS 2007**

These Regulations provide for the amendment of the provisions governing the entitlement to pro-rata State Pension (Contributory) and State Pension (Transition) by bringing the Regulations into line with the contribution conditions set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005.

These Regulations provide for technical amendments to ensure that the requirements of the Regulations are consistent with the primary legislation with regard to the minimum number of full-rate contributions which must be paid by a person qualifying for a pro-rata pension based on a combination of full and modified insurance contributions.

**S.I. No. 862 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (CONSOLIDATED CLAIMS,
PAYMENTS AND CONTROL) (AMENDMENT) (No. 8)
(INCREASE IN RATES) REGULATIONS 2007**

The Social Welfare Act 2007 provides for increases in the maximum rates of social insurance payments arising from Budget 2008.

These Regulations provide for increases in the reduced rates of Illness Benefit, Jobseeker's Benefit, Health and Safety Benefit, State Pension (Contributory), State Pension (Transition), Widow's and Widower's (Contributory) Pension and Deserted Wife's Benefit, and also provides for increases in the rates of tapered increases in

respect of Qualified Adults. All of these increases are effective from the first week in January 2008.

The Regulations provide for increases in the minimum weekly rate of Maternity Benefit and Adoptive Benefit, with effect from 31 December 2007.

The Regulations also provide for the disregard of social insurance contributions, health contributions, superannuation contributions and trade union subscriptions when calculating means from employment of a rehabilitative nature for the purposes of the Blind Pension.

**S.I. No. 863 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (RENT ALLOWANCE)
(AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2007**

These Regulations provide for increases in the amount of means disregarded for people affected by the decontrol of rents and the minimum rent for the purposes of the Rent Allowance scheme with effect from January 2008.

**S.I. No. 864 of 2007
SOCIAL WELFARE (OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES)
(AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2007**

The Social Welfare Act 2007 provides for increases in the maximum rates of benefits payable under the Occupational Injuries Benefits scheme arising from the Budget. These Regulations provide for increases in the reduced rates of the following Occupational Injuries Benefits:

- in respect of Disablement Gratuities appropriate to degrees of disablement assessed at 19% or less with effect from 31 December 2007;
- in respect of Disablement Pension payable in lieu of such Gratuities, with effect from 4 January 2008; and
- in respect of Injury Benefit payable to persons under the age of 16 with effect from 31 December 2007.

APPENDIX 3A: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (SCRUTINY) ACT 2002

Background

In 2002, the European Union (Scrutiny) Act was introduced to enhance the role of the Oireachtas in monitoring and debating the activities of the European Union. On foot of this legislation, the Sub-Committee on European Scrutiny of the Joint Committee on European Affairs was established to examine proposed legislation and other measures emanating from the European Commission and to assess their implications for Ireland. The European Union (Scrutiny) Act also provides that the Government make a report each year to the Oireachtas on developments in the European Communities and the European Union.

Oireachtas scrutiny of EU matters

As required under the Act, Reports on Social Policy Developments were submitted to the Oireachtas during 2007. Four proposals for legislation were also submitted to the Joint Committee on European Scrutiny. Three of these related to the updating of the EU Regulations for co-ordination of social security systems in the EU. The fourth proposal related to a proposed Directive on the acquisition and preservation of supplementary pension rights.

APPENDIX 3B: REGULATORY IMPACT ANALYSIS

Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) is a policy tool designed to identify and quantify, where possible, the impact of new Regulations. It can also be used in the review of existing Regulations. In essence, RIA attempts to clarify the relevant factors for decision-making through the comprehensive and systematic compilation of information. It encourages policy-makers to make balanced decisions when considering legislative action that trade-off possible solutions to a problem against the wider economic and distributional goals.

RIA is designed to encourage evidence-based policy-making by requiring that each element is reported upon and by imposing accountability through the requirement to make the report public. It is intended to establish a standard for rigorous policy work, building on our current procedures.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs is aware of the requirement to apply RIA to all proposals for primary legislation involving changes to the regulatory framework, significant statutory instruments and proposals for EU Directives and significant EU Regulations. Details of the application of RIA in 2007 are outlined below:

General Schemes/Heads of Bills brought to Government in year 2007

Title of Bill	Was RIA applied?
Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2007	Yes, in relation to certain amendments to the Pensions Act 1990 and in relation to some Supplementary Welfare Allowance provisions

Bills published in year 2007

Title of Bill	Was RIA applied?	Where can the published RIA be accessed?
Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2007	Yes, in relation to certain amendments to the Pensions Act 1990 and some Supplementary Welfare Allowance provisions	On the Department's website at http://www.welfare.ie/topics/legis/index.html

Statutory Instruments made in year 2007

Name of Statutory Instrument	Was RIA applied?	Where can the published RIA be accessed?
See Appendix 3 for Regulations promulgated in 2007	No	N/A

EU Directives

Name of Directive	Was RIA applied?/Is RIA being applied?	Where can the published RIA be accessed?
Amended proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on minimum requirements for enhancing worker mobility by improving the acquisition and preservation of supplementary pension rights	RIA being applied and amended as negotiations continue	Not published to date as negotiations are ongoing

APPENDIX 4: PERFORMANCE AGAINST CUSTOMER CHARTER STANDARDS

The current Customer Charter, in which the Department's commitment to customers is outlined, was published in 2004. The achievements against those commitments are as follows:

→ Access to our services

Making our offices accessible for all including people with disabilities

Formal access audits are currently being conducted in all offices. These audits cover all issues relating to access including access for disabled persons. Approximately 15 audits have been completed to date and reports are with the Office of Public Works (OPW) for any remedial works recommended.

Extending our opening hours in many of our Local Offices

The majority of local offices provide a service throughout lunch.

Respecting your privacy needs if calling to our offices

Private interview rooms are available in most offices.

Improving our services for visually impaired customers

A dedicated phone service for the blind is available, whereby applications are taken over the phone.

Improving our telephone answering service by aiming towards a target of answering all telephone calls within 30 seconds

Many sections monitor call answering performance on an ongoing basis using various tools, with a view to achieving the targets set.

Phoning you back if you ask us to

This service is provided by all scheme areas.

→ Provision of information

Providing you with full, clear and correct information on our schemes and services when required

All offices supply information and application forms for the various schemes offered by the Department, with many local offices having dedicated Information Officers. Information on all the Department's schemes and services is published and maintained on the Department's

website www.welfare.ie. Customers can download claim forms and information leaflets from the website. Customers can also request information leaflets and application forms by email or using the LoCall leaflet request line. Information campaigns during 2007, in respect of the All Ireland Free Travel scheme, Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, Carer's Allowance and Budget 2008 were promoted on the website's home page for the duration of the campaigns.

Ensuring our forms and leaflets are simple and easy to understand

Information leaflets and application forms are reviewed on an ongoing basis and updated with reference to 'Plain English' guidelines.

A customer satisfaction survey, which was carried out in Child Benefit section in 2007, showed that 91% of customers found the Child Benefit application forms easy to complete. A similar survey carried out in Disability Allowance section showed that 88% of customers surveyed found the form easy to complete.

Providing help with filling in forms at your local Social Welfare Office or your local Citizens Information Centre (CIC) (contact LoCall 1890 777 121)

This service is provided as required on an ongoing basis.

Supporting employers in the operation of the PRSI contribution system

The Payroll Software Association of Ireland (PSAI) was formed in 2007 with the purpose of facilitating compliance with existing PAYE and PRSI Regulations. During 2007, the Department met with the PSAI on a number of occasions with a view to enhancing communication with software houses and thereby facilitating improved compliance on the part of software users. This relationship will be developed further in 2008.

→ Your claim

Letting you know how soon you may expect a decision on your claim

Scheme areas notify customers if there will be a likely delay in processing a claim.

Advising you how to get financial or other help in the meantime, if necessary

This is standard practice across all scheme areas. Where necessary, customers are advised of the services that may be available to them through other sections of the Department or through the Community Welfare service.

Letting you know the different payment options available

This is standard practice across all scheme areas. The different payment options are outlined on claim forms, information leaflets and the Department's website.

Informing you of the reasons for the decision on your claim

This is standard practice across all scheme areas. Customers receive an award notice informing them of the decision on their claim. Where a customer is disqualified, a claim is disallowed or allowed at a reduced rate, details are given to the customer.

Informing you of your right to appeal that decision and how to make an appeal

This is standard practice across all scheme areas where such a right exists. All decisions issuing to customers advise them of their right to a review and the right of appeal.

Letting you know that you also have access to the Ombudsman's Office

This is normal practice, where appropriate.

→ Comments and Complaints

Promoting and developing our existing Comment and Complaint System

A review of the process for registering and monitoring comments and complaints was undertaken in 2007 and will be subject to ongoing review.

Answering any complaint within 15 working days

This standard is being met across all scheme areas.

Guaranteeing that your complaint will not affect how we treat you in the future

To ensure impartiality, complaints are dealt with by designated complaints officers.

→ e-Government services

Using modern technology to significantly improve the service we give

Service Delivery Modernisation

The key Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) developments in 2007 were as follows:

January 2007

Child Benefit - 570,000 claims were successfully transferred to the current SDM technical platform.

April 2007

Household Benefits - implemented for 340,000 customers.

New Mobile Telephone Allowance introduced.

Free Travel - 70,000 claims transferred to the SDM system.

July 2007

Free Travel - remaining 362,000 claims transferred to SDM.

Messaging facilities, which link systems with the Department and with other departments, were significantly enhanced.

August 2007

Functionality was introduced allowing for the certification of customer circumstance and the introduction of residency and employment certification for non-EU customers. Initial requests for certification issued in respect of 65,000 Child Benefit customers over 16 years of age. Returned certificates are scanned using Optical Character Recognition /Intelligent Character Recognition (OCR/ICR) technology resulting in the automatic extension of claims where appropriate and giving significant reduction in time and clerical effort required for processing in Child Benefit section.

September 2007

Payment Individualisation was made the default option for State Pension (Transition/Contributory). This facility also allows Personal Payable Order customers to be transferred automatically to Electronic Information Transfer (EIT) on transfer to State Pension (Contributory)

from Invalidity or State Pension (Transition) on reaching age 66 years.

November 2007

Electronic Information Transfer (EIT) introduced for Child Benefit paving the way for the elimination of Personal Payable Order books.

December 2007

Budget provisions introduced.

Functionality introduced to invite claims from State Pension (Contributory) customers approaching age 66 years.

Scanning and processing of incoming claims to decision-ready stage using OCR/ICR technology implemented.

Telephone system

A new telephony infrastructure was introduced in Social Welfare Services Sligo during 2007, which provides an improved Interactive Voice Response (IVR) menu to customers, provides more detailed reporting facilities and allows for the introduction of full Voice Response (VR) technology in the future. The necessary technical infrastructure for the introduction of Short Message Service (SMS) (text) has been put in place and the initial deployment of SMS services is planned for early 2008.

Free Travel:

The All Ireland Free Travel scheme was introduced in April 2007. A Smartpass was developed for customers wishing to avail of free travel within Northern Ireland. This pass is compatible with electronic card-readers used on Northern Ireland transport services.

Scanning

Following the introduction of new technology in 2007, certain application forms are scanned directly onto the system facilitating efficient decision-making and reduced claim processing times. The new process has improved customer service and improved control measures.

Payment by Electronic Information Transfer / Electronic Funds Transfer

The change of payment method at post offices - from a book to a social services card - started in September 2007 for new customers.

Child Benefit

All births registered electronically result in the automatic issue of application forms for Child Benefit for first-time applicants, or where Child Benefit is already in payment, the automatic issue of payment by the customer's preferred payment method.

Providing an improved range of services through our website

The website is being redesigned and redeveloped. This will provide a more accessible and user-friendly site. Following the launch of the new site, planned for late 2008, the range of on-line services will be expanded.

→ Treating you fairly

Serving all our customers in an equal, fair and courteous manner

Customer service training is provided to staff to ensure that a high standard of service is maintained. An enhanced translation and interpretation service was provided during 2007 to support non-English speaking customers.

Applying the law consistently and fairly in relation to your entitlements and obligations

This is standard practice across all scheme areas and staff are reminded of best practice on a frequent basis. This is also achieved through the ongoing training of deciding officers.

→ Security and confidentiality

Keeping your personal information safe

This is treated as a priority standard across all areas of the Department. Staff are periodically reminded by circular and by message alerts on their computers of their obligation under both the Official Secrets Act and the Data Protection Act.

Using that information only for social welfare purposes and as permitted by law

This is treated as a priority standard across all areas of the Department.

→ Service through Irish

Providing quality services through Irish and English if required

Documents are provided in Irish in accordance with requirements of the Official Languages Act 2003.

APPENDIX 5: ANNUAL OUTPUT STATEMENT

Part of the Budgetary Process Reforms initiated by the Minister for Finance in Budget 2005, sees the publication by departments of Annual Output Statements from 2007. The Output Statements are designed to match key outputs and strategic impacts to financial and staffing resources for the financial year.

The Department produced its first Annual Output Statement (AOS) in 2007. It is a high level aggregate report linking the Department's strategic objectives with its annual financial allocations and business plans. The 2007 AOS for the Department was examined by the Social and Family Affairs Committee on 29 March 2007. The 2008 AOS will report on actual financial outturns and outputs achieved in 2007 as well as setting-out targets for 2008. The following is the Annual Output Statement for 2007.

Summary of the Department's high level goals in the Statement of Strategy 2005-2007, aggregate impact indicator(s) for each goal and related expenditure programmes.

High Level Goal 1 – Retired and Older People

To ensure adequate, secure and sustainable pensions for retired and older persons and provide additional services in response to changing needs which allow them to maintain a reasonable standard of living on attaining retirement age.

Aggregate impact indicator

- Consistent poverty rates for older people.

Programme

- Retired and Older People.

High Level Goal 2 – People of Working Age

To provide income supports and access to relevant services to people of working age who cannot secure an income (or an adequate income) from employment and facilitate them in taking up relevant employment, training, education or development opportunities as appropriate.

Aggregate impact indicators

- Consistent poverty rates for people of working age.
- Employment participation rates for various categories of people of working age.

Programme

- People of Working Age.

High Level Goal 3 - Children

To ensure the well-being of all children through income support that assists with child-rearing costs in general, including those which arise in circumstances of particular need or disadvantage.

Aggregate impact indicator

- Consistent poverty rates for children and families.

Programme

- Children and Families.

High Level Goal 4 – Coverage, Access and Entitlement

To ensure that the range and level of social security coverage is appropriate to the social and economic circumstances of different groups, that the services for which people are eligible are readily accessible and delivered in an efficient, effective and integrated way, through direct provision to our customers and by supporting agencies in providing services to our customers.

Aggregate impact indicators

- Customer satisfaction as measured by periodic customer surveys.
- Implementation of the Department's Modernisation Action Plan.

Programmes

- People of Working Age.
- Operational Capabilities.

High Level Goal 5 – Poverty, Social Inclusion and Families

To support and promote families and to attain better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieving a more inclusive society through co-ordinating, developing and implementing national anti-poverty strategies, and through the provision of income and other support services for people in debt or at risk of experiencing hardship.

Aggregate impact indicators

- Performance against the agreed range of indicators used to measure poverty at national and EU level (e.g. consistent poverty rate, at risk of poverty gap, at risk of poverty rate anchored at a moment in time etc.).
- Levels of public awareness of poverty and social inclusion issues as indicated by periodic surveys.

Programmes

- Children and Families.
- Poverty and Social Inclusion.

High Level Goal 6 – The Department and its Staff

To develop an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance with a high level of involvement by people at all levels and a climate which fosters personal and career development.

Aggregate impact indicators

- Implementation of the Department's Modernisation Action Plan.
- Staff satisfaction, training and development as measured through participation in training and development, implementation of new work processes, output from feedback processes.

Programme

- Operational Capabilities.

Programme 1: Retired and Older People

High Level Goal

To ensure adequate, secure and sustainable pensions for retired and older persons and provide additional services in response to changing needs which allow them to maintain a reasonable standard of living on attaining retirement age.

Key strategies to achieve the High Level Goal

1. Decide and deliver on pension and other entitlements in a timely, accurate and efficient manner;
2. Propose changes to social welfare pension rates in line with Government policies and the requirements of financial sustainability;
3. Publish a Green Paper on pensions in accordance with Government commitments in *Towards 2016*;
4. Continue to provide additional supports to older people through the provision of Household Benefits and Free Travel;
5. Implement appropriate procedures to control fraud and error based on an assessment of risk;
6. Support the work of the Pensions Board and the Pensions Ombudsman and consult with them to promote extensive, secure and adequate supplementary pension provision; and
7. Implement relevant national and international legislation.

Inputs	2007 Allocation (€ million)
Programme Expenditure	
- Current	4,833.4
Programme Administration	
- Pay	15.8
- Non-Pay	56.3
Total Gross Programme Expenditure	4,905.5
Appropriations-in-Aid	- 6.3
Net Programme Expenditure	4,899.2
Number of staff (full-time equivalent) ¹	350

¹ Staff employed directly on pension and household benefits schemes only. General inspectors also work on the pension schemes but are being returned under Programme 2.

Outputs	Targets for 2007	
(1) Average number of recipients		
- State Pension (Contributory)	229,600	
- State Pension (Non-Contributory)	96,500	
- State Pension (Transition)	7,000	
- Widow'/Widower's (Contributory) Pension	77,560	
(2) Processing Times	Clearance Time²	Volume Context³
- State Pension (Contributory)	55% in 6 weeks	14,000
- State Pension (Non-Contributory)	65% in 8 weeks	11,500
- State Pension (Transition)	80% in 5 weeks	14,000
- Household Benefits (Electricity/Gas Allowance)	70% in 7 weeks	39,000
Telephone Allowance	70% in 7 weeks	49,000
Free Travel (new pass)	90% in 4 weeks	16,000
(3) Control Targets	Reviews	Savings (€m.)
- State Pension Schemes	16,000	18.5
- Household Benefits	13,500	8.0
(4) Finalise (<i>Green Paper on Pensions</i>)	End of March 2007	
(5) Implement the Budget 2007 increases in the means disregards for the State Pension (Non-Contributory)	26,000 approx. to benefit	
(6) Implement All Ireland Free Travel Scheme for pensioners	April 2007	

² Clearance time: Elapsed time from date claim received to date of decision.

³ Volume Context: Annual volume that scheme sections can reasonably be expected to clear.

Programme 2 – People of Working Age

High Level Goal

To provide income supports and access to relevant services to people of working age who cannot secure an income (or an adequate income) from employment and facilitate them in taking up relevant employment, training, education or development opportunities as appropriate.

To ensure that the range and level of social security coverage is appropriate to the social and economic circumstances of different groups.

Key strategies to achieve the High Level Goals

1. Decide and deliver on entitlements in a timely, accurate and efficient manner;
2. Review and develop social welfare schemes for people of working age to ensure that they have an adequate, secure and sustainable income and related supports in a changing work and social environment;
3. Engage meaningfully with persons of working age, particularly those who are unemployed, ill, people with disabilities, lone parents, families on low incomes and marginalised groups. Provide services directly and in co-operation with other relevant agencies to encourage and support these people in taking up relevant work, training, education or development opportunities including through the Activation Sub-programme in the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*;
4. Ensure income supports and associated secondary benefits do not create barriers to seeking, accepting or improving employment, education, training or development;
5. Implement appropriate procedures to control fraud and error based on an assessment of risk;
6. Ensure that payments and supports to carers are efficient and effective, recognising their needs and adequately addressing poverty and social exclusion and are adaptable to the needs of carers in a changing care environment; and
7. Ensure that the coverage of the Pay Related Social Insurance (PRSI) system is appropriate to the respective circumstances of employed, self-employed and other categories of people.

Inputs	2007 Allocation (€ million)
Programme Expenditure	
- Current	6,254.0
Programme Administration	
- Pay	133.8
- Non-Pay	70.9
Total Gross Programme Expenditure	6,458.7
Appropriations-in-Aid	- 10.7
Net Programme Expenditure	6,448.0
Number of staff (full-time equivalent) ⁴	2,860

⁴ Staff employed directly on the administration of the relevant schemes including all local office staff, inspectors and medical referees.

Outputs	Targets for 2007	
(1) Average number of recipients		
– Jobseeker’s Benefit	52,500	
– Jobseeker’s Allowance	80,200	
– Employment Support Schemes	17,860	
– Maternity Benefit and related schemes	17,305	
– Illness Benefit	69,700	
– Occupational Injuries Benefits	14,870	
– Disability Allowance	86,430	
– Invalidity Pension	52,600	
– One-Parent Family Payment	83,550	
– Widow’s/Widower’s (Contributory) Pension	33,240	
– Widow’s/Widower’s (Non-Contributory) Pension	2,200	
– Deserted Wife’s Benefit	9,400	
– Carer’s Allowance and Benefit	33,600	
– Treatment Benefits	820,400	
(2) Processing Times	Clearance Time⁵	Volume Context⁶
– Jobseeker’s Benefit	85% in 2 weeks	120,000
– Jobseeker’s Allowance	70% in 2 weeks	120,000
– Maternity Benefit	80% before start benefit period	28,000
– Illness Benefit	90% in 1 week	200,000
– Disability Allowance	70% in 13 weeks	12,000
– Invalidity Pension	70% in 9 weeks	7,500
– One-Parent Family Payment – Widow	75% in 8 weeks	600
– One-Parent Family Payment – Unmarried	55% in 8 weeks	13,600
– One-Parent Family Payment – Separated spouse	65% in 13 weeks	6,500
– Widow’s/Widower’s (Contributory) Pension	80% in 5 weeks	8,500
– Widow’s/Widower’s (Non-Contributory) Pension	75% in 8 weeks	1,300
– Carer’s Allowance	70% in 13 weeks	6,000
– Treatment Benefits	90% in 2 weeks	684,000
(3) Control Targets	Reviews	Savings (€m.)
– Job-seekers Benefit and Allowance	125,000	137.0
– Illness Schemes ⁷	149,500	76.0
– One-Parent Family and maintenance related payments	50,500	91.5
– Carer’s Allowance (incl. medical review)	10,500	7.5
(4) PRSI inspections – Number of Employer inspections	7,000	10.5
(5) Referrals to FÁS under the Employment Action Plan	All on Live Register referred after 3 months	
(6) Introduce a new payment of up to half the rate of Carer’s Allowance to certain persons in receipt of, or entitled to, another social welfare payment	18,000 approx. to benefit	

⁵ Clearance time: Elapsed time from date claim received to date of decision.

⁶ Volume Context: Annual volume that scheme sections can reasonably be expected to clear.

⁷ Disability Allowance, Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension and Occupational Injury Benefits.

Programme 3 – Children and Families

High Level Goals

To support and promote families.

To ensure the well-being of all children through income support that assists with child-rearing costs in general, including those which arise in circumstances of particular need or disadvantage.

Key strategies to achieve the High Level Goals

1. Decide and deliver on entitlements in a timely, accurate and efficient manner;
2. Develop policies to provide a more effective and integrated range of income and other supports for children and families at risk of poverty to enable them achieve greater self-sufficiency and social inclusion;
3. Maximise FIS take-up through employment support services and targeted information programmes;
4. Implement appropriate procedures to control fraud and error based on an assessment of risk;
5. Provide the necessary support and resources to the Family Support Agency (FSA) to enable it carry out its functions and implement its strategy in relation to supports for families;
6. Support improvements in data collection and analysis on the circumstances of children in families in order to better inform policy-making;
7. Extend and develop the School Meals Programme; and
8. Administer the Early Childcare Supplement Programme on behalf of the Minister for Children.

Inputs	2007 Allocation (€ million)
Programme Expenditure	
- Current	2,848.5
Programme Administration	
- Pay	6.3
- Non-Pay	0.8
Total Gross Programme Expenditure	2,855.6
Appropriations-in-Aid	-0.6
Net Programme Expenditure	2,855.0
Number of staff (full-time equivalent) ⁸	137

⁸ Staff employed directly on the administration of Child Benefit, Early Childcare Supplement and Family Income Supplement as well as the Family Affairs Unit. Child Benefit Increases are administered as part of the relevant scheme in Programmes 1, 2 and 3. Back to School Clothing and Footwear is administered by the HSE's Community Welfare Service.

Outputs	Targets for 2007	
(1) Average number of children/families		
– Child Benefit (children)	1,134,000	
– Child Dependant Increases (children)	342,000	
– Family Income Supplement (families)	27,000	
– Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (children)	61,000	
(2) Processing Times for new claims	Clearance Time⁹	Volume Context¹⁰
– Child Benefit	90% in 1 week	168,000
– Family Income Supplement	70% in 3 weeks	18,000
(3) Control Targets	Reviews	Savings (€m.)
– Child Benefit	35,000	23.5
– Family Income Supplement	15,500	12.5
(4) Review of child income support as envisaged in Towards 2016	Due end 2007	
(5) School Meal Programmes	180,000 meals	1,600 schools
(6) Early Childcare Supplement administered for the Office of the Minister for Children	390,000 children	€406 million cost

⁹ Clearance time: Elapsed time from date claim received to date of decision.

¹⁰ Volume Context: Annual volume that scheme sections can reasonably be expected to clear.

Programme 4 – Poverty and Social Inclusion

High Level Goal

To attain better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieving a more inclusive society through co-ordinating, developing and implementing national anti-poverty strategies, and through the provision of income and other support services for people in debt or at risk of experiencing hardship.

Key strategies to achieve the High Level Goal

1. Implement a streamlined approach to monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the implementation of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion), the National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSSPI) and the social inclusion elements of *Towards 2016* and the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*;
2. Implement a whole-of-government communications strategy on social inclusion to ensure that there is a clear knowledge and understanding of the nature, extent and causes of poverty and social exclusion and the government's strategies to address them;
3. Promote the incorporation of anti-poverty and social inclusion objectives in public policy development by the implementation of Poverty Impact Assessment (PIA) Guidelines;
4. Develop appropriate data and research strategies to inform the development of anti-poverty policies and to facilitate improved monitoring of outcomes;
5. Provide a guaranteed standard minimum income through the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) scheme to any person in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their basic needs;
6. Ensure that the SWA scheme is reflective of changes in work and social patterns and remains suitably placed to meet the needs of those in society requiring income support;
7. Develop the administration of the SWA scheme in co-operation with the Health Service Executive and support the proposed transfer of the functions of the Community Welfare Service to the Department;
8. Continue to co-operate with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in enhancing the transfer of rent supplement claimants to the Rental Accommodation Scheme; and
9. Support, through the nationwide Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), families and individuals identified as having problems with debt and money-lending, in particular people on low incomes.

Inputs	2007 Allocation (€ million)
Programme Expenditure	
- Current	843.4
Programme Administration	
- Pay	1.2
- Non-Pay	57.7
Total Gross Programme Expenditure	902.3
Appropriations-in-Aid	-1.0
Net Programme Expenditure	901.3
Departmental staff (full-time equivalents)	28
Community Welfare Officers (HSE) approx ¹¹	700

¹¹ In addition about 230 staff are employed in the Money Advice and Budgeting Service which is funded by the Department.

Outputs	Targets for 2007
(1) Average number of recipients	
– Basic SWA payments	25,300
– Rent Supplement	60,500
– Fuel Allowance	282,000
(2) 1st report on implementation of Ireland’s National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion submitted to EU	September 2007
(3) 1st annual Social Inclusion Report submitted to <i>Towards 2016</i> Partnership Steering Group	October 2007
(4) Progress report on Poverty Impact Assessment pilots to be included in the Annual Social Inclusion Report	October 2007
(5) Annual Social Inclusion Report to detail specific measurement indicators and data sources in relation to targets	October 2007
(6) Establish MABS on a statutory basis	By end 2007

Programme 5 – Operational Capabilities

High Level Goals

To ensure that the services for which people are eligible are readily accessible and delivered in an efficient, effective and integrated way, through direct provision to our customers and by supporting agencies in providing services to our customers.

To develop an effective, adaptable and capable organisation and a culture of pride, innovation and performance with a high level of involvement by people at all levels and a climate which fosters personal and career development.

Key strategies to achieve the High Level Goals

1. Implement the Department's Modernisation Action Plan, which sets out 60 areas for action including Service Delivery Modernisation, management information and new case review policies;
2. Publish and implement new Human Resource Strategy covering the period 2007-2009;
3. Implement the integration of human resource processes with the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS);
4. Provide high quality training and development supports to managers and staff in order to support achievement of the Department's strategic and business objectives;
5. Operate and maintain ICT systems to support the delivery of services in a readily accessible, efficient, effective and integrated manner;
6. Deliver continuous improvement in quality customer service through the systematic modernisation of work practices and the development of enhanced ICT supports;
7. Promote and develop a strong customer service culture through the Department and the agencies under its aegis;
8. Deliver, and support the delivery of, a quality, comprehensive and up-to-date information service;
9. Maintain timely, accurate and efficient systems of decision and redress for social welfare entitlements;
10. Maintain robust systems of internal control, risk management and corporate governance;
11. Ensure quality accommodation is provided and is maintained to the highest standard to enable customers and staff to have a clean, comfortable and safe environment; and
12. To deliver through the Reach project a standard means of access to public services through the Public Services Broker (PSB).

Inputs	2007 Allocation (€ million)
Programme Expenditure	
- Current	30.2
Programme Administration	
- Pay	44.2
- Non-Pay Current	117.9
- Non-Pay Capital	20.3
Total Gross Programme Expenditure	212.6
Appropriations-in-Aid	-0.4
Net Programme Expenditure	212.2
Number of staff (full-time equivalent) ¹²	982

¹² Includes staff in all the support areas of the Department e.g. Personnel, Accounts, Information Services Division (IT operations and development), Facilities Management, the Aireacht and Secretariat.

Outputs	Targets for 2007
HR	Integrate Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) with other HR processes (e.g. promotion and progression on salary scales)
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide 350-400 formal training courses – Provide 13,000 days training, including on-the-job training – Invest a minimum of 4% of payroll cost in training
Health and Safety	Ensure a Health and Safety risk assessment is carried out at each departmental location
Payment volumes processed	Approx 65 million transactions of which: Personalised Payable Order: 46% EFT: 33% EIT (via Post Offices): 12% Cheque: 9%
Modernisation projects	SDM Household Benefits system implemented SDM Child Benefit scheme implemented on new technical platform
Posts decentralised under Government programme	Carrick-on-Shannon: 130 posts Sligo: 50 posts
Risk Management	Implement an integrated process of both corporate and operational risks and embed the principles of risk management into the Department's business processes
Buildings	143 offices in 84 cities/towns including 12 headquarter buildings and 58 local offices

APPENDIX 6: PROGRESS REPORT ON CAPITAL PROGRAMMES

In addition to the Guidelines for the Engagement of Consultants in the Civil Service (March 1999) and the Guidelines for the Appraisal and Management of Capital Expenditure Proposals in the Public Sector of February 2005 and as part of ongoing reforms in relation to public expenditure management, Departments are obliged to include in their annual report progress on their capital programmes in excess of €30 million. While none of the Department's projects exceeded €30 million in 2007, the following have cost over €30 million since their initiation.

A) Service Delivery Modernisation Programme

The Service Delivery Modernisation (SDM) programme is a multi-annual programme of work involving the introduction of new technology and the replacement of legacy computer systems. It also involves the redesign of back office systems, business processes, procedures and work practices and the introduction of new organisational structures.

The programme which comprises business, organisation and technical streams is designed to be implemented in self-contained phases. Each phase delivers key business benefits, extends the business object model chosen by the Department and strengthens and enhances the underlying technical architecture.

The key business objectives are to provide:

- a high quality, proactive, personalised service to customers;
- delivery of services in a more efficient, flexible and integrated way;
- support for new work management practices and procedures;
- support for the recording of overpayments and debt recovery; and
- delivery of the eGovernment strategy.

The first phase of SDM, which focused on the Child Benefit scheme, was successfully implemented in November 2002.

SDM Phase 2

SDM Phase 2 commenced in May 2004 to include Retirement Pension, Old Age (Contributory) Pension (renamed State Pension (Transition) and State Pension (Contributory) in 2006), Free Travel, Bereavement Grant, Early Childcare Supplement and Overpayment and Debt Management.

In January 2007, the Child Benefit scheme was transferred onto the SDM technical platform (570,000 claims successfully transferred). In April 2007, Household Benefits in respect of 340,000 customers were implemented on the SDM system together with 70,000 Free Travel claims for clients not in receipt of a social welfare payment.

The SDM Business Object Model was further expanded during 2007 to cater for new business initiatives as follows:

- certification functionality was developed for the Child Benefit scheme to provide a control measure allowing ongoing certification of entitlement;
- the scanning of returned Child Benefit certificates, enabled by a strengthened Publish and Subscribe mechanism, was implemented in September 2007. This was an extremely successful implementation realising significant increases in productivity in dealing with the extension of Child Benefit schemes to children aged over 16 years;
- the scan functionality was further developed in 2007 to allow for scanning of Household Benefits applications and to cater for continuing eligibility certification. This functionality will be implemented in the live environment in mid-January 2008; and
- individualisation functionality was implemented in September 2007 allowing for individualisation by default, particularly where schemes are transferred to State Pension (Contributory) (SPC) from Invalidity and State Pension (Transition), as the customer reaches 66 years of age. This implementation also allows PPO customers to be transferred automatically to Electronic Information Transfer on transfer to SPC.

SDM Phase 3

The next phase of the SDM programme is scheduled to commence in January 2008 and will cover the replacement of the Customer Object with the objective of delivering an integrated and improved set of customer-related services. It will also extend the Business Object Model to further scheme areas and strengthen and enhance the underlying technical architecture.

While none of the individual projects involved cost over €30 million, expenditure on all SDM-related projects in the period since commencement (2001 to end 2007) amounts to €42 million.

B) Reach

The Reach project arose out of proposals by the Department for a cross-departmental unit to pursue a number of aspects of integrated delivery of Government services. In 2000, the Government decided that the Public Services Broker (Reachservices) would be the framework within which the integrated electronic services should be delivered. Reach has developed since then through a number of separate projects and the underlying approach has also been modified in line with changing technology and related developments.

While none of the individual projects involved cost over €30 million, expenditure on Reach-related projects in total since 2000, which includes ongoing annual operational and support costs for the live environment since 2006, is in the region of €70 million.

APPENDIX 7: VALUE FOR MONEY AND POLICY REVIEWS

The Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative provides a basis for a systematic analysis of what is being achieved by expenditure in each programme area. Since the launch of the expenditure review initiative in 1997, the Department has completed 22 expenditure reviews. During 2007, work continued on the Review of Social Welfare Payments to Carers and work on the Review of Information Services commenced. A review of Disability Allowance will begin in 2008.

The recommendations made in completed expenditure/value for money reviews are monitored on an ongoing basis by the Department's Policy Committee. Progress on all expenditure/value for money reviews under the current round, including implementation of recommendations from completed reviews and the impacts achieved as a result, are set out below.

Reviews completed under the 2006-2008 schedule

→ Value for Money Reviews

Supplementary Welfare Allowance - Phase 2

Progress has been made in implementing a number of the recommendations of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Review:

Rent and Mortgage Interest Supplement/Rental Accommodation Scheme

The review identified a number of issues relating to the incentives under the Rent Supplement scheme for those wishing to take up an employment opportunity. Budget 2007 and the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 introduced a number of measures to address these issues.

Capital Assessment

The SWA Review recommended an easing of the means test for SWA purposes in the assessment of capital. Under the previous rules the first €520 of capital was assessed at one-twentieth with the amount in excess of this amount assessed at one-tenth. Budget 2007 and the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2007 provided for an improved capital assessment under which:

- the first €5,000 of capital is disregarded;
- the next €10,000 is assessed at €1 per €1,000;
- the next €25,000 is assessed at €2 per €1,000; and
- excess of €40,000 is assessed at €4 per €1,000.

Core Functions Project

The Government, in its decision of 28 February 2006, accepted the recommendations of the Working Group on the *Core Functions of the Health Service* which recommended the transfer of certain functions from the Health Service Executive (HSE) - including the administration of Supplementary Welfare Allowance - to other agencies, principally this Department and to consider transferring certain other functions from this Department to the Health Sector. A Steering Group for the Core Functions Project, chaired by this Department and including representatives from the Department of Health and Children, the HSE and the Department of Finance, is overseeing the implementation of the Government decision.

The recommendations in the SWA Review support the objectives of the Core Functions Project and provide a template through which it can be implemented.

One-Parent Family Payments

The Government discussion paper *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents* put forward proposals for the expanded availability and range of education and training opportunities for lone parents and two parent families on low incomes, the extension of the National Employment Action Plan to focus on low income parents, focused provision of childcare, improved information services and the introduction of a new social assistance payment for low income families with young children.

The Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion is continuing to develop an implementation plan to progress the non-income recommendations in tandem with the development of the legislation required to introduce any new payment.

Discussions are ongoing with the relevant departments and agencies on issues including childcare, education, training and activation measures.

The Department, with the co-operation of FÁS, the Office of the Minister for Children and the Department of Education and Science, is currently testing the non-income activation proposals in Kilkenny and Coolock. The focus of these tests, which commenced in November 2007, is on identifying and resolving the practical and administrative issues that may arise in advance of any scheme being introduced. This will allow for operational and logistical co-ordination between the relevant departments and agencies to be considered and will facilitate the development of the policy and operational details of the new scheme. The tests will run until end-March 2008, after which a report will be prepared for the Senior Officials Group and the Government.

Medical Review and Assessment Service

The review identified 15 key programmes for reform of the Department's medical review and assessment process. Each programme represents a 'mini-project' and will run concurrently over the duration of the project.

A project implementation team has been established which will work with a consultancy firm/firms to progress the various programmes of the project. Request for Tender (RFT) documents are being finalised and will issue in the first quarter of 2008. The RFT will be seeking consultancy expertise and assistance in both the Business and ICT fields.

Four new Medical Assessors (MAs) were recruited in 2007 to fill existing vacancies. A further six MAs are in the process of being recruited to fill two existing vacancies arising and to increase the cadre by four to twenty five.

Work has commenced to reduce the number of medical examination centres currently in use by the Department.

Jobseekers Benefit/Assistance for Atypical Workers

The main recommendations of the review, particularly in relation to the introduction of

part-time availability for Jobseekers Benefit, will need to be considered in the context of a wider review of the jobseeker schemes. However, there are some recommendations which can be progressed in advance of this wider review of the schemes. These include the alignment of the unemployment week with the calendar week and the inclusion of Sunday as a day of employment /unemployment. The implementation of these recommendations will have considerable IT and administrative implications.

→ Policy Reviews

Green Paper on Pensions

The *Green Paper on Pensions* was launched in October 2007. A national consultation process was begun which will continue until mid-2008.

Reviews to be completed

→ Value for Money Reviews

Social Welfare Payments to Carers

During 2007, the draft report was amended to take account of issues raised in the quality assessment. The report will be completed in early 2008.

Information Services

Terms of reference for this review were agreed with the Department of Finance in August 2007. Work on the review has commenced and it is expected that the review will be completed by the end of 2008.

Disability Allowance

Terms of reference for the review have been agreed and an internal steering group, which will oversee the review, will have its first meeting at the end of January 2008. It is expected that the review will be completed by the end of 2008.

→ Policy Reviews

Combat Poverty Agency

A review of the role and functions of the Combat Poverty Agency in a changed environment commenced in December 2007 overseen by a Steering Committee comprising senior officials from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, other relevant Government departments and the Combat Poverty Agency. It is expected that the review will be completed by the middle of 2008.

APPENDIX 8: MINISTERS OF THE DEPARTMENT SINCE 1947

Name	From	To
James Ryan	22 January 1947	18 February 1948
William Norton	18 February 1948	14 June 1951
James Ryan	14 June 1951	2 June 1954
Brendan Corish	2 June 1954	20 March 1957
Patrick Smyth	20 March 1957	27 November 1957
Sean McEntee	27 November 1957	24 June 1959
Sean McEntee	24 June 1959	12 October 1961
Kevin Boland	12 October 1961	21 April 1965
Kevin Boland	21 April 1965	16 November 1966
Joseph Brennan	16 November 1966	2 July 1969
Kevin Boland	2 July 1969	6 May 1970
Joseph Brennan	6 May 1970	14 March 1973
Brendan Corish	14 March 1973	5 July 1977
Charles J Haughey	5 July 1977	12 December 1979
Michael Woods	12 December 1979	30 June 1981
Eileen Desmond	30 June 1981	9 March 1982
Michael Woods	9 March 1982	14 December 1982
Barry Desmond	14 December 1982	14 February 1986
Gemma Hussey	14 February 1986	10 March 1987
Michael Woods	10 March 1987	18 July 1989
Michael Woods	18 July 1989	13 November 1991
Brendan Daly	13 November 1991	11 February 1992
Charlie McCreevy	11 February 1992	12 January 1993
Michael Woods	12 January 1993	15 December 1994
Proinsias De Rossa	15 December 1994	26 June 1997
Dermot Ahern	26 June 1997	17 June 2002
Mary Coughlan	17 June 2002	29 September 2004
Séamus Brennan	29 September 2004	15 June 2007
Martin Cullen	15 June 2007	7 May 2008
Mary Hanafin	7 May 2008	

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